The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of concerned citizens of this great province of ours with respect to youth crime, and I'll read the prayer:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to establish a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, as well as crimes of violence including the charge of attempted murder of a police officer; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

I so present.

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

I also bring forward petitions today on behalf of the citizens of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

> Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to: (1) change the Saskatchewan big game damage compensation program so that it provides more fair and reasonable compensation to farmers and townsfolk for commercial crops, hay, silage bales, shrubs, and trees which are being destroyed by the overpopulation of deer and other big game, including the elimination of the $500 deductible; and (2) to take control measures to prevent the overpopulation of deer and other big game from causing this destruction.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioner will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have pages and pages of these petitions, and I see they range everywhere from Avonlea to Spring Valley, Melville, Rama — many from the community of Rama — Gravelbourg. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I present to the Assembly petitions from concerned citizens in Saskatchewan concerning the issues of misdirected youth.

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to create a special task force to aid the government in its fight against escalating youth crime in Saskatchewan; such task force to be comprised of representatives of the RCMP, municipal police forces, community leaders, representatives of the Justice department, youth outreach organizations and other organizations committed to the fight against youth crime.

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan, I'd like to present a petition on the big game compensation program.

> Wherefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to change the Saskatchewan big game damage compensation program so that it provides more fair and reasonable compensation to farmers and townsfolk for commercial crops, staked hay, silage bales, shrubs and trees, which are being destroyed by the overpopulation of deer and other big game, including elimination of the $500 deductible; and (2) to take control to prevent the overpopulation of deer and other big game from causing this destruction.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to present petitions on behalf of Regina citizens concerned about the closure of the Argyle Elementary School. The petition reads as follows:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to close the Argyle Elementary School and instead keep this important and viable education facility open and operating at full capacity, and in doing so continue to benefit the hundreds of children and families in the area.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition comes primarily from the city of Regina residents concerned about this very important issue, and I'm pleased to present on their behalf.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, to present petitions on behalf of many hundreds of people from the province of Saskatchewan:

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reduce the PST by two points to 7 per cent in the 1997 provincial budget, and table a long-term plan for further reductions in the PST in the years ahead.
>
> And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And as I said, Mr. Speaker, these come from Saskatoon, Nipawin, Carrot River, Regina, Kindersley, Alameda, and well, just generally all across the province. And I'm happy to present these today.

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

> Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the municipal

revenue-sharing reduction and commit to stable revenue levels for municipalities in order to protect the interests of property taxpayers.

I so lay on the Table, 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 establish a task force to aid the fight against the problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to change the Saskatchewan big game damage compensation program so that it provides more fair and reasonable compensation to farmers and townsfolk;

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reverse the decision to force hunters to pay the entire cost of big game damage; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reverse the municipal revenue-sharing reduction.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 9 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan): (1) provide details of any meetings taking place between officials of Talisman Energy and cabinet ministers, Crown Investment officials, and/or any other government official prior to February 13, 1997, at which the possible take-over of Wascana Energy was discussed; (2) what are the dates and locations of any such meetings; (3) did any telephone and/or conference calls regarding the take-over of Wascana Energy take place prior to February 13 between any representatives of the government and Talisman Energy; (4) please provide a list of all individuals in attendance at any such meetings; (5) were any written minutes, briefings, and/or notes taken at any such meetings pertaining to Talisman's attempted take-over of Wascana Energy; and (6) please provide names of any cabinet ministers and/or other government officials who indicated support for the Talisman proposal at any such meetings and/or whether they considered Talisman's proposed bid of $18.50 per share a fair price; and if so, which cabinet ministers or other government officials provided Talisman with this commitment?

I so present.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 9 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance): what percentage of those charged with driving with blood alcohol content over .08 in the year 1996 in Saskatchewan were under the age of 19; and (b) what percentage of those receiving the 24-hour licence suspensions due to a blood alcohol content over .04 in 1996 in Saskatchewan were under the age of 19?

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move the first reading of a Bill, the non-profit corporations amendment Act, 1997.

And I so present.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 9 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Northern Affairs: during the 1992-93 fiscal year, how much revenue did the government collect from northern Saskatchewan from the following sources: (1) mining; (2) forestry; (3) tourism; (4) personal income tax; (5) corporate income tax; and (6) fuel tax? I have questions for each of the years of '92-93, '93-94, '94-95, '95-96.

And I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 9 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Health: (a) which hospitals and/or care facilities in Saskatchewan have the capability to administer streptokinase for acute heart attack victims and which do not; (b) how many of these facilities have access to a qualified physician either in the facility or available on short notice; and (c) which districts have ambulance service capable of cardiac monitoring, heart attack victim stabilization, and safe transfer to a coronary care unit?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Yes, it's my pleasure to welcome today fellow parents from Argyle School. My two daughters attend Argyle School; and welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure as well to introduce guests seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker — several members of the École Argyle parents and community association as well as parents from other committees from several Regina schools. These parents are very concerned about the possible closure of these nine Regina elementary schools.

I would like to add that we have received dozens of phone calls from other parents who want to be with us today in the legislature. Unfortunately they could not take time away from their work. But it's our pleasure to introduce those folks in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, here today to see the proceedings this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you I take pleasure introducing to the Assembly my youngest daughter, Jeanette, and also a friend of the Liberal Party, Jonathon Dennis.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Bruno Axemen — Provincial Broomball Champions

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Bruno Axemen, a midget boys broomball team from my home town who won the Saskatchewan provincial championship held in Bruno Saturday, February 22.

The Axemen, led by tournament co-MVP (most valuable player) recipient, Tyler Weiman, allowed only one goal in three games to capture the gold medal finish. They opened the tournament with a three to nothing win over Saskatoon and went on to defeat Odessa two to one, finishing first in the three-team round robin. In the final game, they defeated Saskatoon again by a score of six nothing.

Congratulations to the Bruno Axemen midget boys provincial broomball champions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Regina Housing Starts

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in today's *Leader-Post* there's a picture of a new house being constructed. This is a normal activity in my constituency which is a rapidly growing neighbourhood in south-east Regina and area.

Also on page 4, there is an article which says that I'm not the only Regina MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) who should be happy. In the first two months of this year housing starts in the city are up 58 per cent over the same period last year.

This good news from the NDP-leaning (New Democratic Party) *Leader-Post* is particularly noteworthy because it comes on top of the 1996 figures which tell us that housing starts in 1996 in our urban areas increased by 47 per cent over 1995, and by 30 per cent in the rural areas.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the article states that one reason for the increase in new homes is that the market for existing homes is so hot that not enough are available to meet the demand. We had record sales in 1996 and builders are now scrambling to catch up. Sales are expected to increase this spring. Of course it takes workers with jobs to build houses, so this is good news for workers, builders, and buyers.

So, Mr. Speaker, here is the question. Do we ignore the statistics that tell us the Saskatchewan population stands at its highest level since 1989, marking 12 consecutive quarters with increases, as the opposition would do; or do we believe our eyes and the visible evidence that all about us the Saskatchewan economy . . .

The Speaker: — Next member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of Louis Morin

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to draw to the attention of all members the passing of a very highly respected resident of my constituency. Louis Morin passed away February 10 at the age of 76.

Mr. Morin enjoyed a long and active life. He was highly involved in his community of Turnor Lake, serving on the school board, as mayor and deputy mayor of the town council, and was also a member of the northern municipal council.

Mr. Morin was also a senator with the Metis Nation of Saskatchewan, was president of the Saskatchewan Trappers Association, was founder and president of the Northern Fur Conservation Trappers Association as well.

Mr. Speaker, Louis Morin was an adviser and supporter to many people and was always available to help anyone. He put people's concerns ahead of his own many, many times.

Louis was a father, a grandfather, a great grandfather and a strong believer in northern native people. Louis was best known for his strong work in setting up Palmbere Days and working for and with the small communities. Louis enriched the lives of all those who knew him and even those who didn't. His valuable contributions to those in the North cannot be understated.

And I would ask all the members to join with me in expressing condolences to Mr. Morin's wife, Marie Louise, and his entire family, and applauding his effort and his long-time, lifelong contribution to his people and his communities.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Upgrading of Wheat Pool Elevator in Weyburn

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is Agriculture and Food Week in Saskatchewan and as a measure to contribute to the awareness of agriculture's significance to our economy, I would like to congratulate the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool on its $8.4 million upgrade to its elevator in Weyburn.

Mr. Speaker, the Weyburn elevator will expand its capacity from 10,000 tonnes to 32,000, and its ability to handle railcars will increase to 112 with a capability of loading 5 cars simultaneously. In addition, cleaning and drying facilities will also be added to the reconditioned elevator. This expansion will in effect triple the elevator's capacity and add seven people to its full-time staff as well as several part-time staff, as will be required.

Mr. Speaker, in this time of rapid change in the agriculture industry, I wish to congratulate the Wheat Pool for its

expansion in Weyburn. With the expansion, the Wheat Pool will continue to provide quality service for the Weyburn and area farming community. The Wheat Pool is demonstrating its recommitment to producers in Weyburn and area. This, Mr. Speaker, is not only good news for Weyburn but for the province of Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Alberta Provincial Election

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today is election day in Alberta and I know it's a tradition of the House to wait until after the election to congratulate the winner, but I'm going to be up at Saskatoon at SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) tomorrow so I'm going to go out on a limb right now, Mr. Speaker, and congratulate Premier Ralph Klein and his PC (Progressive Conservative) Party on the election to another PC majority government. The only bit of suspense left in this election is whether the Tories will win most of the seats or all of the seats, Mr. Speaker.

Even some of the PCs we talked to in Alberta are afraid the province will be left without an official opposition. They don't think that that will be good for Alberta. And we all know what it's like here in Saskatchewan when you don't have an official opposition. You wind up with lousy government like we have right now. But regardless of the size of the majority, I know Ralph Klein and the PC Party will continue to provide excellent government for the people of Alberta.

Recently Dale Eisler wrote that our Premier may actually be a little jealous of Premier Klein. In fact I know that it must be kind of tough for our Premier stuck here between two successful Conservative premiers on each side of him. It's a little bit like a big hunk of Spam stuck in between the sandwich of prairie Conservative politics.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the House will join with me in wishing luck to all of the candidates in the Alberta election and congratulating Ralph Klein and his PC team.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Wilkie Citizens of the Year

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, Wilkie got a head start on Agriculture and Food Week by celebrating Farmers' Day on Saturday. There were a number of events to mark the day and I want to single one out in particular. At the pancake breakfast beginning the day, the Wilkie Citizen of the Year awards were handed out. Six citizens were recognized with a plaque and with a heartfelt round of applause.

The citizens honoured by their community were Kathy Heilman, Francis Love, Bill Sittler, Margaret Skinner, Julie Brooks, and Wally Lorenz. These six people have worked tirelessly to promote the well-being of Wilkie, and I am very happy to bring the special recognition of their community to this Assembly and to the people of Saskatchewan, because people of their calibre and spirit deserve the widest recognition possible. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Passing of Karen MacDonald

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mourn the recent passing of Karen MacDonald of Oxbow in a tragic car accident. Karen will be missed by her husband, Ron, and by her father and mother, Don and Marni, and the rest of the MacDonald family.

Karen was a speech pathologist who was active in band and sports and loved life to the fullest. Her family and friends often benefited from her great personal warmth. Karen's father Don, Mr. Speaker, is a former member of this House and an active resident of the Moose Jaw community.

I'm sure other members will join me in expressing our condolences and offering our prayers to the Rodenbush and MacDonald families at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Image Wireless Communications Introduces New Technology

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and applaud the technological innovation that has taken place in the city of Yorkton for Saskatchewan. On March 5, Mr. Speaker, Image Wireless Communications introduced a new multipoint microwave distribution system, MMDS in short.

This new technology, first of its kind in Canada, will give rural residents affordable access to services that were, until now, available only in urban centres. In fact the new system will provide access to approximately 60,000 homes throughout rural Saskatchewan that do not have cable TV today. Not only will rural residents be able to tune into Saskatchewan Communications Network, they will also have the opportunity to be captivated by the fast-paced, action-packed excitement of this legislative session.

As important, Mr. Speaker, the new MMDS system will create 30 new jobs in the city of Yorkton and throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Image Wireless Communications for their entrepreneurial leadership in this industry. It is this kind of innovation that will ensure the prosperity and vitality of our communities across the province.

I ask all members, Mr. Speaker, to join me in congratulating the achievement of Image cable television in their endeavour in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health Districts Pharmacy Contracts

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the East Central Health District recently sent out tenders for

pharmacy services for special care homes in that district. One of the businesses that received this tender found it strange that as a condition for receiving a contract, the successful tender would be required to pay a fee back to the district.

This business told my office that they have contracts with other districts and have never seen this kind of payback requested before.

Mr. Minister, the Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association itself has expressed concern about this type of tendering practice. Can the minister tell this House whether he supports such a practice?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I believe what the member says is true to my information and I can tell the member that representatives of the Department of Health have had several contacts with the district to discuss the matter.

And we have requested, and the district has agreed, to set aside the fee until we can consult with the Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association and finalize a policy with respect to the tendering and provision of pharmacy services to long-term care residents. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure the member that if upon a proper review this practice is found to be an unsuitable practice, this practice is not now being followed and this practice will not be followed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One would hope that when health districts award these types of contracts, of course they will be awarded at the lowest possible cost. Now we learn that at least one health district feels it's necessary to charge contractors for letting them provide this service.

However, Mr. Speaker, the question is, is this as a result of the government's health reform, the wellness model? Is it forcing governments as a lack of funding coming from the provincial government to stretch to these types of tactics to try and gain a little extra cash inflow into their coffers?

Mr. Speaker, my question would be to the minister. He always talks about the health districts being on their own, being able to make their own decisions, and here he's stepping in right now and saying this isn't right — it isn't going to happen again. How many more things are going to happen with the districts, Mr. Speaker, that the minister is going to have to intervene in, and what is his plan for the districts in the future in intervening and stopping of them doing their business as they feel necessary?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the East Central Health District, like every health district, will want to consider matters when questions such as the member has raised are brought up. They are just as willing to consider the propriety of that kind of arrangement as we are, Mr. Speaker, and they're doing so.

And I think that takes care of that matter, Mr. Speaker. And perhaps since the member seems overly concerned about people getting money from various sources, while the member is at it, why doesn't the member review the propriety of the Leader of the Liberal Party being on the payroll of the Liberal caucus office, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gaming Addictions

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was alarmed to hear the minister in charge of Liquor and Gaming indicate to the media yesterday that there is nothing surprising about the explosion in the number of people attending Gamblers Anonymous meetings. I was more alarmed to hear the minister indicate that this is an issue that the public should not be concerned about.

Mr. Speaker, in January the government confirmed that a review of the gaming industry was taking place, but an examination of gambling addiction would not be part of such a review. Will the minister responsible explain why such a growing problem is being virtually ignored by his government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And first of all I want to correct the member from Melville. I had not said yesterday that there was an explosion or surprised by an explosion. That, Mr. Speaker, is the way in which the media have interpreted what I had indicated.

What I said, Mr. Speaker, is that in Saskatchewan we've seen organized, regulated growth in gambling and gaming, and as a result of that what we've seen is we've seen some increases, some small increases, in the people who are in fact addicted.

I also indicated to both the member on several occasions that we have in Saskatchewan some of the best education and health preventative service anywhere in Canada and put more money into addictions programing that anywhere in Canada, Mr. Speaker. And we're leading the nation in that area.

I've also indicated and reiterate again, Mr. Speaker, that in combination and support with the first nations people, we are now leaders in this province in terms of all of the addiction services and treatment education that we provide across the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — I appreciate the minister's response, Mr. Speaker. However, the latest figures from the province's gambling addiction tell what's happening. The hot line shows a tremendous increase in the amount of people calling to request help. The only survey conducted on the gambling addiction issue was conducted three years ago before gaming was fully introduced in this province, yet the government indicates it is adequately funding gambling addiction programs.

Will the minister explain how this government can honestly say

that it is properly funding gambling treatment programs when it has no updated study, which should and would determine the level of gambling addiction in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what's important to recognize here, and I've indicated again to the member opposite in our discussions that we've had in the past, that in fact in Saskatchewan we've just reached an opportunity now where gaming, in terms of its development, has finally reached a plateau.

We just opened, not more than two months ago, the final casino in Saskatchewan. In this province we've capped the number of VLTs (video lottery terminal) that we have, in fact reduced the number of VLTs that we have in this province. We have bingo associations across the province, Mr. Speaker, that are nowhere else identified anywhere in Saskatchewan. We've been monitoring on a regular basis through the Department of Health, both through the department offices and non-government organizations, the number of people who are in fact showing up . . . or people who are identifying some indicators of having some addiction issues. And so the whole monitoring process has been in continuum.

I want though however, to indicate that recently in an article that I read that was in the Alberta newspaper, where in fact the member opposite that asked me the question — from Melville — indicates that we need to let gambling continue to grow in Alberta in support of the Alberta Liberal position.

Wascana Energy Take-over Bid

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Crown Investment Corporation is considering an offer of $18.50 a share for their Wascana Energy shares. At the same time the board of directors for Wascana Energy, which includes two government-appointed members, is recommending that investors not sell their shares for this value.

Will the minister explain the difference between these positions and assure this House that the interests of Saskatchewan taxpayers will be protected?

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite. The province has two roles with respect to the offer that's been made by Talisman for Wascana Energy. One is the enforcement of The Wascana Energy Act which has requirements with respect to head office; and that's our obligation regardless of ownership.

The second obligation, and separate, is an obligation to assess on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan whether or not it is an appropriate price and whether or not to sell. That decision will be made before the end of the offering period, either positively or negatively, and will be based on external advice to ensure that we do get maximum value for the people of Saskatchewan, or retain the shares.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, the offer to purchase Wascana Energy states, and I quote:

> Rural employee levels will be maintained for at least six months and thereafter the purchaser will demonstrate restraint regarding any realignment of Wascana's rural Saskatchewan staff. The rural staff of Wascana Energy currently consists of some 250 employees.

Is the minister concerned? And what action is he prepared to take about the possible loss of these quality jobs six months down the line?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — The responsibility of the government in this case is the enforcement of The Wascana Energy Act, as I indicated earlier. And we will enforce strictly the terms of The Wascana Energy Act.

The discussion between the proponents and the public with respect to whether or not a particular offering should be received will be dependent on other obligations the offerers may want to make. Our responsibility is, as I said, to enforce The Wascana Energy Act and to make a decision with respect to the eventual disposition of our interests in Wascana.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Proposed Regina School Closures

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Education.

Madam Minister, the Premier has been saying that this year's budget will see more money for priority areas like education. You have repeated that same message as well, and that I think is good news. But for hundreds of Regina families that await the outcome of the Regina school board's decision to close nine elementary schools, the news isn't complete, Madam Minister. Closing schools is a very serious matter. It directly affects the quality of education our children receive, the viability of neighbourhoods, property values, and much more.

Madam Minister, how can you dangle money in front of the noses of school boards and the future of 800 Regina children and their families without telling them what they can expect? Madam Minister, how much more money can the K to 12 system expect from you and your government this year?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I too want to welcome the parents of the various schools that the Regina school board is looking at closing or amending the program.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult issue. And if you look at this issue over the last 30 years, school closures in the province of Saskatchewan have been a fact of life. If you look at the trends — going back into the '60s — each year the province of Saskatchewan, regardless of funding, schools have closed. And

if you look at the facts, the facts tend to demonstrate that the closures are associated with demographics.

In my own constituency of Saskatoon Nutana, we have seen five school closures in my own riding. And one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, is that older people have tended to stay in the neighbourhood and younger people have not moved in. Now that trend is starting to change. But, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the facts in the province of Saskatchewan, it tends to deal with demographics, declining enrolment; and if you look at the legislation, school divisions have the power to decide whether or not a school will remain open.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Madam Minister, don't give us that line about how school boards make their own decisions without the influence from you. It simply isn't true. You control the purse-strings, Madam Minister. Your cut-backs to education are forcing school boards to close schools. You have publicly stated that there will be more money for education, Madam Minister. You call the shots, ultimately.

This Friday, less than a week before your budget, the Regina school board is making a decision whether or not to close nine schools in Regina and uproot over 800 children and their families. Madam Minister, school boards are saying to you: show me the money, show me the money, Madam Minister.

Will you today tell the Regina school board what funds you are giving them so they can make informed decisions this Friday? Will you do that, Madam Minister? And if not, will you postpone the decisions by the board until after the budget?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I find the question coming from that particular member, the Progressive Conservative leader, quite interesting. Mr. Speaker, if you look at school closures in the province of Saskatchewan, let's go back to the 1982 year when the Tories were in power. There was a 9.7 per cent increase in educational funding and look, 12 schools closed. In 1983-84, there was a 10.5 per cent increase in educational spending and 19 schools closed; in 1985, a 9.2 per cent increase in educational funding and 13 schools closed.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, when the Tories were in power, there were 150 school closures when they were increasing spending in education. Since our term of office, there have been 59 school closures or an average of only 12 schools a year — not 15 schools a year, as under the Tories.

My point is, Mr. Speaker, it has nothing to do with funding. It has to do with declining enrolments.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Public Prosecutions Review Report

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to the minister, you notice all those comments were increasing education. The school boards made the decisions on the closures, not the government by cutting the funding.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, the Martin report on public prosecutions has been sitting on your desk for a couple of weeks now. Will you release that report today?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report was received approximately 10 days ago and it will be probably released, as I said, in about another two weeks.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, we've seen many, many problems with your prosecutors' offices. The Milgaard case, the Martensville case, the Latimer case, all of these cases have been badly mishandled by your public prosecutors. And now we learn that there hasn't been a proper flow of information between prosecutors and police in dealing with car thefts by young offenders.

In some cases, prosecutors were advising the judge on sentencing without even knowing the offender's complete history.

Mr. Minister, the Martin report is already six months overdue. It's been on your desk for a couple of weeks; now you're talking a couple more. Hopefully, it contains recommendations that will improve public prosecutions in this province.

Mr. Minister, why are you refusing to release this report? Why don't you release it now? What are you hiding?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report will be released in two weeks and the hon. member will have a chance to review it at that time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Youth Crime

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last two days in this House have demonstrated some clear points about the position of the three parties on the serious issue of youth crime. We have a Minister of Justice who minimizes the issue and appears indifferent. On the other hand, we have a third party which is so irresponsible as to suggest that if we simply lock up all our young people and throw away the key, there'll be no one left to steal cars.

The official opposition has called on this government to demonstrate leadership and establish a special task force to examine youth crime and to bring together enforcement agencies, youth outreach agencies, native elders, and community groups.

Will the minister explain if he remains content to sit back and do nothing and ignore the issue, or will he take the first important step in dealing with the issue by accepting the Liberal recommendations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very willing to listen to suggestions from all places, including the Liberal Party. And we're looking at the suggestion that's been

made.

But what I would say is that we as a government and as the ministry of Justice are very concerned about youth crime. We've always been very concerned about youth crime. And we have been working very carefully with the Department of Social Services, with the cities' police forces, with the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), with all of the community groups, to address this issue. And we will continue to do that work in as careful and as clear and as focused a way as we possibly can.

We are also, as part of our theme for this session of the legislature, talking about investing in children. And I think it's very important to recognize that 95 per cent of the youth in Saskatchewan are good young people who are going to contribute to the future of our province. And that with the continued emphasis that that party seems to place on this issue, they are distorting and taking away from all of the very good youth of our . . .

The Speaker: — Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Group Homes Funding

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday in this House I challenged all the members of the legislature to join the official opposition in adhering to a $4 food budget for one day. This challenge was aimed at highlighting the fact that the amount allotted for food to residents of group homes, $4 per resident per day, is a rate that is unrealistically low.

Mr. Speaker, this issue has clearly brought to my attention, and that of my caucus colleagues, that it is very difficult to sustain oneself both mentally and physically on $4 a day. And it is almost impossible to meet the guidelines set out in the "Canada Food Guide" on this small budget.

Mr. Speaker, we believe it is important that this government get the message. We are speaking about a decent food allowance for vulnerable members of our society. Therefore I am asking the Minister of Social Services once again, will he and his caucus colleagues accept this challenge and try to eat well on a $4 food budget tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat something that I said yesterday. That is that this government is well aware of the issues facing the group homes in our province. When I meet with the group homes — and I've met with many of them; I've received correspondence with many of them — they tell me almost unanimously, Mr. Speaker, that the issue they face has to do with the wages and benefits for their employees.

Mr. Speaker, I had a letter . . . I received a letter this month from the Mackenzie group home which the member referred to yesterday, a letter which does not mention the issue of food subsidy for their group home. Not a mention in the letter. Do you know what this letter mentions, Mr. Speaker? It mentions increases to the Canada Pension Plan put on them by the federal Liberals.

Now finally let me say this, Mr. Speaker. While I recognize, Mr. Speaker, that these are not rich allowances, I want the member to be aware that according to the latest work done by StatsCanada, available in the Legislative Library right across from her office and across from the office of her research staff, StatsCanada indicates that according to its latest figures in the province of Saskatchewan, the average cost for groceries to feed an individual in this province is $3.75 per day.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. The Chair's having a great level of difficulty being able to hear the hon. member for Humboldt and I'll ask all hon. members to allow her to put her question.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I find it incredibly difficult to believe that this government is concerned at all about poverty when the Minister of Social Services does not even take it upon himself to in fact take care of those very people put under his care.

Mr. Speaker, we feel it is important that MLAs learn firsthand the implications of their policy decisions in this Assembly. And even if it is only a symbolic gesture, it is still important. Unfortunately, this government does not see the value in such an exercise, and that is part of their problem. They are not in touch with the concerns of Saskatchewan people, especially the most vulnerable members of our society.

Now with all due respect to the minister, that is a matter that falls under his responsibility. We have seen him duck the issue and we have seen his lack of sensitivity to the issue. This is becoming increasingly apparent to those requesting his help, and the general public.

Will the minister explain when we can expect a sign of leadership from him and his government instead of excuses and meaningless lip-service?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, only the Liberal caucus does not recognize that this government has shown leadership nationally on the issues of benefits to families and children, recognized most recently in a Champions for Children award delivered on a national basis, Mr. Speaker.

I invite the member, I encourage her, to encourage that high-priced research staff they have working for that caucus to do some real research before they come into this House. I repeat again, according to StatsCan — this is based on the most recent census figures — the average cost to feed an individual per day in store-bought groceries is $3.75.

I recognize, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, that our group homes face some real financial challenges — we're well aware of that and we're giving it active consideration — related to staff costs, to staff benefits. Not the least of the benefits which is causing the group homes problems now are increases in the Canada Pension Plan benefits demanded by the Liberals.

And I repeat again, Mr. Speaker, I repeat again, if this caucus wishes to substantially address the issues of poverty in our province, they would stand with us in addressing the federal Liberals about the cuts to social programs which have decimated programing across the country.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Flood Damage

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, each year during fire season we hear the government address the problem accordingly by budgeting the necessary funds. However, when flooding occurs, Saskatchewan residents are left to fend for themselves as their crops and their livelihood are washed away by spring run-off.

Will the minister in charge of Sask Water explain how his government has determined that fire is an emergency and flooding is not?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be more than happy to describe the work that has been done by this government with respect to the potential for flood in this upcoming spring.

Sask Water has been working with other arms of government with respect to emergency planning. We have been monitoring, informing municipal governments and farmers with respect to potential damage in their given circumstance. We have been working with the Saskatchewan Emergency Planning group to deal with information and dissemination of information.

Municipal government emergency measures advisers are on 24-hour stand-by. We have turned over the government supply of sandbags to the appropriate municipalities. There is a brand-new crop insurance program in place, put by the Minister of Agriculture, for this upcoming crop season. And, Mr. Speaker, as well, a provincial disaster assistance program is in place for municipalities that may in fact incur problems.
So for the member to stand in this House and suggest that the government has not been doing their job is absolutely, totally inaccurate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 204 — The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1997

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have it prepared. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend the education and health tax, 1997 now be introduced and read a first time.

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

Bill No. 1 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 1997.

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

Bill No. 2 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of a Bill, of Bill No. 2, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1997.

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

Bill No. 3 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1977

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill No. 3, The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1997.

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

Bill No. 4 — The Municipal Board Amendment Act, 1977

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I move first reading of Bill No. 4, The Municipal Board Amendment Act, 1997.

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

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I'd ask leave of the House to move some motions of condolence.

Leave granted.

CONDOLENCES

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I believe that we have three former members that we wish to recognize, and I'll say a few words about each one of them; at the conclusion of each individual member, move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Speaker, I first rise today to pay tribute to the passing of a former member of this Assembly, Mr. Arthur Kluzak, of Climax, Saskatchewan. Art Kluzak was born on July 13, 1906, at East Grand Forks, Minnesota, U.S.A. (United States of America). He leaves to mourn his two sons, Gord and Glen, one daughter, Helen, and numerous grandchildren. Mr. Kluzak was predeceased by his first wife, Hazel, in 1980 and his second wife, Betty, in 1992.

Mr. Speaker, Art Kluzak was raised on the family homestead in the Canuck district and later farmed there. In addition to farming, he was involved in several other ventures. He was a grain buyer with the Saskatchewan Pool elevators at Climax

and at Tompkins. He owned an auto court in North Battleford and for a period operated the Climax Hotel.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kluzak was also active in farm and community organizations. He helped organize the Co-operative Livestock Association in Tompkins and played a leading role in establishing the local stock yards there. He was a member of the school board in the Canuck district and served on the village council from 1954 to 1960. As well, he served as president of the Climax Board of Trade and the local Co-op Locker Plant.

Art Kluzak was first elected to this House in 1960 as the then CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) member of the Legislative Assembly for the Shaunavon constituency. Art served one term with the Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd governments before returning to Climax to farm. In 1975 he retired from farming. In his retirement years he continued to spend his summers in Climax but also enjoyed the warm weather of Arizona in the winters.

Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for many members of this House when I say that Art Kluzak will be remembered and missed for his dedication to his community, his province, and his country, his commitment unending to social justice, and his service to the political people, the political life, and the quality of life of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I would therefore like to move, seconded by the Leader of the Official Opposition, by leave of the Assembly:

> That this Assembly records with sorrow and regret the passing of a former member of this Assembly and expresses its grateful appreciation of the contribution he made to his community, his constituency, and to the province.
>
> **Arthur Kluzak**, who died in Calgary on October 24, 1996, was a member of this Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Shaunavon from 1960 until 1964. He was born on July 13, 1906 at East Grand Forks, Minnesota and moved with his family to the Canuck district in Saskatchewan in 1912. He spent his childhood on the family homestead and was educated at local rural schools. Later he operated his own farm with his wife, Hazel, who he had married on October 9, 1930.
>
> Mr. Kluzak's farming background led to his involvement as a grain buyer with the Saskatchewan Pool elevators at Climax and Tompkins. He organized the Co-operative Livestock Association in Tompkins and then played a leading role in establishing the local stock yards.
>
> Mr. Kluzak's business interests extended beyond his farming operation. He owned an auto court in North Battleford for six years and later owned and operated the Climax Hotel. Throughout his life, Mr. Kluzak was an active participant in a variety of community organizations. He served on the school board in the Canuck district, and later as a village overseer from 1954 to 1960. While living in North Battleford, Mr. Kluzak was a member of the rotary club and chamber of commerce. He served as president of the Climax board of trade and with the local Co-op Locker Plant.
>
> Mr. Kluzak entered provincial politics in 1960 by winning the Shaunavon constituency. Following his term in office he continued to farm until his retirement in 1975. Predeceased by his wife, Mr. Kluzak married Betty Miller in 1981.
>
> In recording its own deep sense of loss and bereavement, this Assembly expresses its most sincere sympathy with members of the bereaved family.

I so move.

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

I would like to add just a few comments following what the Premier's comments were, and as I think he laid out, Art was very much a community man and very much a family man. And I think Art knew all too well the struggles that people went through, especially through the '30s, living in rural Saskatchewan. And Art, of course, had to deal with some of the struggles that were very hard to overcome.

And in fact in light of one very unbearable situation that Art found his family to be in, having being faced with a young son with some medical problems and a family without financial resources to take care of those medical problems, really became, I think, the driving force behind Art's desire to get into politics to fight for certain things that he truly believed in — and fight hard for those things. What he wanted for himself and for his family, he wanted for everyone in the province. And I know that his family and friends are very proud of his achievements in that area, fighting for a very comprehensive prepaid medical insurance program. I know he championed that issue as one of his own. And I know that the Shaunavon constituents at the time, and still do, talk very highly of Art's accomplishments in this area.

The other thing that I think Art should . . . you know, will always be remembered for of course is his family involvement. He's known throughout his family and . . . I'm a very close personal friend of the Kluzaks — our family has been for many years — and know many of the stories from talking to his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

And Art became somewhat of a . . . his phone, his home, was the switchboard for all the family concerns. Because I believe his daughter lives in Quebec if I'm not mistaken; he has one son in Alberta, and the remaining family members, I think the bulk of them, are around the Climax area and Shaunavon area.

(1430)

And of course he took quite an involvement in especially his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And many times I would see Art in the last three, four years at the Shaunavon Public School. He seemed to always be there attending different functions put on, to watch, you know, Dara or some of the other . . . Donovan, in school plays and such.

And of course the Kluzaks are known for a lot of hockey

ability. And we all know all too well of Gord's accomplishments. But Art took a great desire in the game and he was always seen at the rink watching some of his grandchildren or great-grandchildren playing and always loved to talk about the game.

The other place where Art and I used to enjoy some conversations, and I'd see him there every so often, were at some of the town hall meetings, at the senior citizens' centre. Art was always there. And whenever he saw me in the crowd, he made sure that there was a seat beside me. He would ask somebody to clear a seat because he just loved to talk politics — not at the level where we're debating, you know, whether to vote for this party or that party, but at a different level, one of what we can all do regardless of party stripe to enhance the way people live.

He was always there to add his voice at the seniors' meetings to ensure that the health care for the people that he knew and were surrounded in his community wasn't jeopardized. And he always wanted his view put forward and it was one that was very common sense and always appreciated. And I know from talking with many of Art's family or family members, he's going to be . . . is and will be sorely missed.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the PC caucus to join with others and other members in recognition of Mr. Kluzak, the former member for the constituency of Shaunavon. And of course his home, as was indicated, was in Climax.

I'm sure that Mr. Kluzak would have been one who could have easily told the Liberal Party how it was to live on $4 a day for most of his life, having gone through many of the experiences of rural Saskatchewan, as people around the province did during those times of his lifetime.

As we have already heard, Mr. Kluzak served as the MLA from 1960 until 1964, certainly a challenging time in our province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Kluzak led an active and full and rich life, as we have heard, and we attest to that from his reputation. His family must feel extremely fortunate that their father, uncle, and grandfather enjoyed life to its fullest for 94 years.

Although born in the United States, Mr. Kluzak was close . . . chose, rather, to remain in Canada and chose to be a part of the system here and a part of the community that he lived in. Mr. Kluzak obviously held the Prairies close to his heart because he stayed with them through thick and thin.

Mr. Kluzak made many important contributions to the Shaunavon area and was integral in many of the cooperatives and agricultural organizations in Shaunavon and in the surrounding area. And certainly we don't need to go over that list again, but we do acknowledge that very long list, Mr. Speaker.

I know that Mr. Kluzak will be fondly remembered and greatly missed for many years to come. And, Mr. Speaker, we would just say that in recognizing this fine gentleman, it doesn't matter what party he was with, as the other members have indicated his political philosophy by reputation. And I have to say by reputation because I didn't have the honour of knowing this gentleman in person. But certainly, living close to where he came from and watching his political career and his life, his reputation indicated that he had strong ties for the community, and we acknowledge that today. And we wish the family our condolences as well.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I rise today to, along with other members of the Assembly, remember Art Kluzak, who represented the Shaunavon constituency between 1960 and '64.

Mr. Speaker, many years ago, when I was much younger, I had an opportunity to work for the then federal government as a customs officer at the border crossing at Climax and I, at that time, got to know the Kluzak family, including Art, relatively well.

And I want to say that in getting involved in politics, one of my mentors at that time, in fact, was Art Kluzak and the principles that he represented. And Art was on the executive of the then NDP in the Shaunavon constituency and we had many conversations about the advantages and disadvantages of getting involved in politics.

One of the things that always stuck in my mind was the commitment that Art had to the principle of medicare. And he often talked about the moments of his political career that stood out over and over again, was here in the Assembly and around the Assembly, around the province, the great debate in 1962 when he, along with the CCF, endeavoured to implement medicare, what then came to be a national program across this great country.

And I want to say that those years that Art lived in the south-west, a very, very, obviously dry area of the province, tough to make a living. The people who came there early were a very, very distinct group of people. And Art, being the son of Czech immigrants, homesteaded in the Canuck area.

And I want to say that the comments and article that I want to quote from, from the *Commonwealth* back in 1959 I think, tell a lot about the character of Art Kluzak, And in this article of November 18, 1959 it says:

> A product of rural Canadian schools, married with three children and four grandchildren, it would seem inevitable that such a product of farm life, so plentifully endowed with energy and vision should be selected to bear the CCF standard in the constituency which he knows so well and which he has helped to build. On his record, a better choice than Arthur Kluzak would be hard to find.

And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that it really is with those thoughts in mind that I stand here today to remember Art Kluzak along with other members of the Assembly.

I want to join with the member from Wood River when he says that Art was very, very close to his family. He was ever so proud, particularly, of his grandchildren. And I know that his granddaughter Norma and her husband, who live on the farm at Claydon, when I would visit there, he would often show up

with fresh vegetables that he would have grown in his garden after he retired as a very successful farmer in the Climax area.

I want to say as well that the last time officially being with Art was at the induction of his grandson Gord to the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame here in Regina, at the Centre of the Arts. And I remember Art wiping away tears from his eyes as Gord was inducted into the hall of fame.

And it's with these pleasant memories of a very, very dear friend that I want to add my condolences to his children — his son Glen, who still operates the family farm at Climax; his son Gordon of Calgary, who he was with at the time of his passing; and to his daughter Helen from Montreal.

And I would like to join other members in offering condolence to all his family members and friends.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise this time to pay tribute to the passing of another former member of this Assembly, Mr. George Leith of Winnipeg.

George Leith was born at Saskatoon on June 18, 1923. He leaves to mourn his daughters, Margaret, Georgia, and Deborah; sisters Margaret and Edith; and numerous grandchildren. George Leith was predeceased by his wife, Beryl.

Mr. Speaker, George Leith was raised on the family farm in the east-central part of Saskatchewan. He was educated at Padgate School, later City Park Collegiate in Saskatoon, and then went on to take further studies at the University of Saskatchewan. In 1943 George Leith enlisted in the Canadian Forces, and following the Second World War, returned to Saskatchewan to continue farming.

George Leith was first elected to this Assembly in 1964 as a Liberal representative for the constituency of Eston-Elrose and served for two terms. In 1971 he ran for Leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party, which inspired around his leadership the formation of a group called group 171, as I recall it, or leadership 171, the number of the supporters who he initially attracted and the loyalty of the supporters around the ideas which he advocated at that time, running for the party leadership. They were very much enthralled and enthused with the ideas that this dynamic group of young Liberals and other Liberals contributed to the Leith candidacy.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that I recall George Leith on a personal basis since I entered the House here in 1967. George served in many capacities as the Chair of various committees of this House. And many qualities come to mind. The fact that he was very approachable and a very personable person is the one that immediately comes to my mind. I think this is also a very important characteristic in politics, which sometimes I think we forget a little bit about today, because we're able to carry out our differences . . . we should be able to carry out our differences here on political grounds, partisan grounds, in the House and yet be able to approach each other outside this legislature as people with varying political philosophies to be sure, but none the less still dedicated to the common good of the province of Saskatchewan.

George was that kind of a person. You could really share all kinds of talk with him and it would be done in a friendly way, personable way, and in a confidential way.

Another characteristic which enters my mind is his fairness. In the chair he was very, very fair. I got into one dispute with George in the chair when I was seated over in opposition. I forget what the debate was about. George asked me to withdraw some remarks which he viewed to be intemperate. I can hardly imagine today that I would be guilty of such an offence, but apparently I was. And as a new member of the House I didn't know what to do, whether to withdraw the remarks. I mean I knew I should withdraw the remarks, and half of my colleagues were saying don't withdraw the remarks; hang in there; make your point. The other half were saying, withdraw.

I was saying, where's my leader? I need some advice as to whether to withdraw or not. My leader was not available at the time so I was left on my own. We brought in then another person who is of a different dimension but, and I say this in a loving way, was a character of this House, Jim Snedker. Jim was the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

And, Mr. Speaker, if I may say so with the greatest respect to you, unlike you, whenever Jim Snedker got angry — and I know you get angry; you contain your anger — Jim used to take off his glasses in anger and would just simply flip them down on the table in front of you with such force they'd slide straight off the table and down on the floor and of course then he wouldn't be able to see his papers and make the proceedings.

Well anyway they adjourned the committee meeting in order to call in the Speaker to give me one more last chance as to whether to withdraw or whether to stick by my guns. And I was scared. I didn't know what to do. At that stage in the game, to make a long story short — or long — I ended up apologizing to the House.

Mr. Snedker, Speaker Snedker, left the chair. George Leith returned to the chair and two minutes later I got a little notation from George saying, Roy, you did the right thing — not to me but to the institution of the Assembly.

(1445)

And believe it or not, ever since that time I have always, always accepted, believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, the ruling of Mr. Speaker and of the Chair regardless of who occupied that particular position.

So he was fair, and he was very intelligent — highly intelligent, well educated. And I don't say this with any partisan terms. George Leith really gave what the Liberal Party I think desperately needed in that period of time. It went through a devastating defeat in 1971, and as so often is the case with recriminations and analyses as to why the defeat takes place, is the danger that any political party, any organization, can tear itself apart.

George Leith joined the campaign which ultimately was won by

Davey Steuart — another great politician, Davey Steuart, by the way. And George Leith brought to that leadership campaign the dimension of new intellectual thought, I felt, if I may say so as an outsider, to the Liberal Party. It was needed. It moved the debate beyond recriminations. It permitted Davey Steuart to continue on as leader and to expand the tent, as it were, to incorporate some of the ideas that group 171 advocated.

And I think while it didn't work out for the best, as things have proven to be the case historically for the Liberal Party over the years since '71, what it did do is, I think, played a very vital role in making sure that this great party, Liberal Party — I don't subscribe to it, never have — but this great party of Canada was a very viable entity from 1971 onwards. And George Leith contributed to that debate on a provincial and national basis.

Well I could tell you other anecdotal stories and other versions of my life here in this House with George Leith, but this is really a person who I truly, truly have missed from political life and mourn in his passing today.

In the 1970s, George continued his political involvement after moving from this House by being special assistant to Eugene Whelan, the federal minister of Agriculture. I often wonder, by the way, how that could have been a mix and a match, but none the less it apparently worked out fairly well.

And then George Leith in 1986 opened up a new chapter in his life and career. He served in a very distinguished manner as Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Grain Commission until 1989. And then in 1990 he chaired the National Committee on Grain Transportation. Goodness knows how important that is today — always — in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

George Leith enjoyed many, many activities in addition to his work. He was a member of numerous organizations such as the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers, the Masons, the Royal Canadian Legion, and he was very active in the United Church. During his retirement years, George Leith spent his time doing the things he loved most — a little bit of golfing, a little bit of travelling, a little bit of flying; I guess a little bit of politicking. I didn't know this, but they say even a little bit of wine-making. Maybe even a little bit of wine-tasting. At least I hope that was the case as well. His close friend, Evelyn, joined him in his pursuits.

Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for many members of this Assembly when I say that George Leith will be remembered — and missed — for his warmth, his dry wit, his generous spirit, and his great contribution to the people of Saskatchewan and Canada. Therefore I move, seconded by the Leader of the Official Opposition, by leave of the Assembly:

> That this Assembly records with sorrow and regret the passing of a former member of this Assembly and expresses its grateful appreciation of the contribution he made to his community, his constituency, and to the province.
>
> **George Gordon Leith,** who died in Winnipeg on May 31, 1996, was a member of the Legislative Assembly representing the constituency of Elrose from 1964 until 1971. Mr. Leith was born on June 18, 1923 in Saskatoon but was raised on the family farm in the east-central part of Saskatchewan. He received his early schooling at the Padgate School and continued his studies at City Park Collegiate and the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. Mr. Leith enlisted in the Canadian Forces in 1943, serving first with the army and then with the air force. Following the war, he returned to Saskatchewan to resume farming.
>
> Mr. Leith's provincial political career began as a candidate in the Eston constituency in the 1960 general election. He did win election to this Assembly in 1964 and again in 1967. Mr. Leith unsuccessfully sought a third time but continued to be a very active participant in his party, including seeking the leadership of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party in 1971, as I've described.
>
> In the early 1970s Mr. Leith's political interests shifted to the federal level when he served as a special assistant to the federal agricultural minister, Eugene Whelan. Mr. Leith's appointment to the Canadian Grain Commission in 1976 began a lengthy period of service which included a term as Chief Commissioner from 1986 to 1989 and another as chairman of the National Committee on Grain Transportation in 1990.
>
> At home in his community, George Leith was a member of the Sovereign Masonic Lodge No. 192, the Lodge of Perfection, Rose Croix, Scottish Rite, past president of the Rosetown branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. He also had an interest in flying and belonged to the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers.
>
> In recording its own deep sense of loss and bereavement, this Assembly expresses its most sincere sympathy with members of the bereaved family, Mr. Speaker.

I so move.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to add to the words of the Premier, in memory of Mr. George Leith.

Mr. Leith was remembered as a man of dry wit and generous spirit. He will be sadly missed by his family and friends and I wish to offer them my condolences and recognize the great contributions Mr. Leith made to the province, to the county, and to the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan.

World War II veteran, farmer, politician, and public servant, Mr. Leith wore many hats throughout his public life. A prominent and well-respected member of the Liberal Party, Mr. Leith served the Eston-Elrose constituency in the 1960s.

In 1971 he made a bid for party leadership, but his career took him to Ottawa where he served as special assistant to the minister of Agriculture. From there he moved to Winnipeg where he served on the Canadian Grain Commission, eventually becoming the Chief Commissioner, as already noted.

As his career progressed, Mr. Leith helped shape our agricultural industry for Canada. But his contributions at the national and provincial levels do not overshadow his community involvement. A Mason and a legionnaire, Mr. Leith was known for his wide-ranging interests. He never lost the love of flying he developed in the air force and was a member of the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers.

During his retirement, he kept in close touch with family and friends as he explored art, literature, music, and the world beyond Canada's borders.

With his passing, his loved ones and our country lose a man of warmth and dedication. Today I would like to ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing the contributions Mr. Leith made to our province. Thank you.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join with other members in remembering the life and service of George Gordon Leith. George Leith was a man who gave much to his community; he was a man who cared. Mr. Leith represented the Eston-Elrose constituency, part of which I now have the privilege of representing. He was indeed a political institution in the area.

Mr. Leith was involved in many different organizations including the Masons, the Rose Croix and Scottish Rite. He was president of the Rosetown branch of the Royal Canadian Legion and a member of the Saskatchewan Flying Farmers. And still Mr. Leith found time to serve his community to the fullest in both federal and provincial politics.

I didn't know Mr. Leith personally, but I've heard many kind words for and about Mr. Leith. George Leith demonstrated, through example, the kind of life all of us strive for: a life filled with integrity and honesty; a life of working and giving to others. He'll be sorely missed by his family and friends scattered throughout the province.

We offer our most sincere condolences to Mr. Leith's family and friends.

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I too join with others to offer our condolences to the family of Mr. George Leith. George Leith was the MLA for the Eston-Elrose constituency, as it has already been said, which is part of the larger constituency of Rosetown-Biggar now.

I also did not have the chance to meet Mr. Leith, but I did have the opportunity to be exposed to his family; they were well-rooted in the Liberal tradition. As a fledgling New Democrat in the early 1970s, I had the privilege of scrutineering in a poll in the Glamis area. I think we got one vote in that poll at that time. And so it speaks to the respect that was there for the traditions which George had established and from which he had grown.

George, as already been said, was a member of the community; rich in family experience, and a great contributor to the community locally, provincially and abroad.

He served, as you have heard, our province with integrity and with great honour, and went on to serve at the national level, both in his role with the Hon. Eugene Whelan and also as the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Grains Commission, serving our agricultural industry and bringing honour to Saskatchewan and to the agricultural industry.

So I want to register, with others, my sorrow and regret at his passing, and to express our appreciation for the lasting contribution he's made to our province.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to attach my name to those of the former members that spoke so eloquently on behalf of the memory of George Leith.

Mr. Leith was my MLA in the constituency that he represented from the time that I was 11 until I was 17 or 18 years old. And though it's safe to say we did not share the same party affiliation, I know there was always a great deal of respect for George Leith, and a tremendous amount of respect for his community involvement in the sense of where he came from and what he stood for.

I want to share one other part of George's life that I believe I'm . . . I shared a part of that more so than anyone else in the legislature. And that was, during George Leith's run to become Leader of the Liberal Party, this now MLA had a George Leith button on. I and a cousin of mine went to that Liberal leadership convention just to poke our noses in and see what was going on, and we had a grand time up in the Leith suite upstairs.

In George's suite there was coffee and tea. You could have milk. There was certainly cookies and dainties around. My firm recollection, at the ripe old age of 17, was there was a different leadership candidate whose room was hopping more with some of the stronger spirits, if I may describe it that way.

But I was in fact quite pleased to be wearing the Leith badge because, if the Liberals indeed needed a leader, I felt at the time that George Leith would've made the best leader — I hope the family will forgive me for this if I say it — the best leader out of a bad lot. But I say that with a smile on my face.

I am, Mr. Speaker, honoured to have been able to celebrate a part of George Leith's life and I certainly express my condolences to his three daughters and the balance of the family. Indeed, George Leith served a very honourable life and one that we should be proud of. Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, at this time I rise to pay tribute to the passing of yet another former member of this Assembly, the late Mr. Dmytro Zipchen of Saskatoon, better known as Dick Zipchen.

Dick Zipchen was born on August 10, 1905 in Western Ukraine, part of the world that my mom and dad came from. The following year he came to Canada with his family and he spent his childhood on the homestead near Hafford, Saskatchewan.

He leaves to mourn his son Roman, two daughters, Patricia and

Lucille, and numerous grandchildren. Dick was predeceased by his wife, Mary, and daughters Natalie and Margaret.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, Dick Zipchen attended a one-room school in the Hafford district. He later completed courses in mechanical engineering and weed control at the University of Saskatchewan. He operated the family farm at Hafford, a farm that has now been in the family for four generations. In addition to his farm work, he was a weed inspector for the RM (rural municipality) of Redberry. During the 1930s he started an implement business, and to show you how well-rounded he really was, Dick Zipchen was also an auctioneer.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Zipchen began his lifelong commitment to his community and the people of Saskatchewan as a young man when he served as a secretary-treasurer of Nauka School, and later as board member of the Blaine Lake School District.

In 1936 he served on the Hafford town council and was a reeve of the rural municipality of Redberry for eight years. In 1946 — and I'd like members to note this — Dick Zipchen was Chair of the first board of the Hafford Union Hospital. This board introduced its own hospitalization scheme one year prior to the introduction of the province-wide hospitalization scheme. That takes a lot of guts and foresight and a lot of hard work.

Dick Zipchen was active in cooperative ventures. He believed in cooperation. He was one of the first members of Co-op Implements Ltd., served on the board of directors of the Hafford Co-op Association and the Hafford Credit Union.

Mr. Speaker, Dick Zipchen was elected to this House in 1952 as a CCF member for the Redberry constituency. And as an MLA he served on the committee that established the guidelines for the grid road system in the province of Saskatchewan, still today an integral feature of our province.

Dick Zipchen always maintained an interest in community and in politics. I never knew him, Mr. Speaker, in the sense of serving with him in the Legislative Assembly — even I can't say that with respect to Dick — but I sure knew him from the Redberry constituency.

There were two Dicks there who were absolutely dynamos — Dick Zipchen and then followed by Dick Michayluk — and these two were probably the most personable, easy to meet and approach politicians that I have ever met. And they were passionate about their ideas and their ideals.

And if you'll notice Dick Zipchen's background as I've outlined it to you, one may not particularly argue that this is a person who took the benefit of high university learning and extended education, yet he had a worldliness about him and a knowledge about him about the issues of the day, which is exemplified by this example of the first hospitalization scheme in his area and exemplified by the grid road system and exemplified by his lifelong passion for debating ideas.

And when these guys were on the stage . . . Well I'll speak about the late Dick Zipchen for the moment although the same comments apply to Dick Michayluk — maybe Dick even on a slightly aggravated basis — they would get going, in English, to a large crowd. And in the middle of an English sentence, would drop in four or five or six or eight words or even phrases in Ukrainian which fit right into the main sentence thought, closing off in English without missing a beat. It was almost as if they would say the several words, comma, Ukrainian words, comma, back to English to make the point, exclamation mark.

I only wish the rules of the House would allow me to tell you one true story that I personally heard and witnessed when the crowd was in its full flight in Hafford and I was on the stage, eyes agog, mouth agog, watching the fantastic oratory. I can't do it because it involves language which I'm sure would be unparliamentary. Not on the part of Dick but on the part of one of the participating audience members. Because that was the other thing that took place very often. You know, you'd work the audience in the sense of saying, and what did the Liberals give you, or what did the Conservatives give you? And back would come the response by the crowd — very, very spontaneous.

Well it was just a treat to be around these people because they brought good ideas and they brought humour and they brought passion. And they brought, as I say, a worldliness — the world was more than just Hafford; yes, community and family — but a worldliness to their job.

And so when Dick served and finished his time in this House, he continued to be very active in the community and political affairs I've outlined. He was a vendor at the liquor board store in Hafford, was Chair of the Hafford Senior Citizens Low Rental Housing Authority. He continued to give us heck when we didn't do the things we should be doing. Occasionally would praise us when we did some of the things that we should be doing. He enjoyed his favourite pastimes of hunting, fishing, and gardening.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I speak for many members of this Assembly and for those outside this Assembly who probably do not know Dick when I say that Dick Zipchen, Dmytro Zipchen, will be missed for his energetic dedication to his community, to his province, to his country — his adopted country — and to his political party, and his commitment to improving the lives of Saskatchewan people. Boy, what a full, dynamic life he led. If that could be said about us, that's about all that can be said.

And, Mr. Speaker, with those thoughts and memories, I move, by leave of the Assembly, seconded by the official Leader of the Opposition, the following:

> That this Assembly records with sorrow and regret the passing of a former member of this Assembly and expresses its grateful appreciation of the contribution he made to his community, his constituency, and to the province.
>
> **Dmytro Zipchen**, who died in Saskatoon on June 25, 1996, was a member of this Legislative Assembly from 1952 until 1956, representing the constituency of Redberry. Mr. Zipchen was born on August 10, 1905 in Horodenko in western Ukraine. The following year he emigrated with his family to Canada and homesteaded near Hafford. Mr. Zipchen received his formal education in a

one-room rural school and later completed courses in mechanical engineering and weed control at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. On February 3, 1935, Mr. Zipchen married Mary Maksymiuk.

Mr. Zipchen continued to farm the homestead that had been in his family for four generations. He was also employed as a weed inspector and auctioneer, and for a number of years operated an implement business with the Cockshutt Plow Company. He also was employed as a vendor at the Hafford liquor board store.

Mr. Zipchen's devotion to improving his community was illustrated by his dedicated service in a number of organizations. He was the secretary-treasurer of his elementary school and later a Hafford and district representative to the Blaine Lake School Unit No. 57. He served on the Hafford town council and was a reeve for the rural municipality of Redberry for eight years.

Mr. Zipchen was a founding member of the Co-op Implements Ltd., the Hafford Co-op Association, and the Hafford Credit Union. He was the chairman of the Hafford Union Hospital Board and witnessed the board introduce its own hospitalization scheme one year prior to the provincial hospitalization plan. The Hafford Senior Citizens Low Rental Housing Authority also benefited from Mr. Zipchen's service as chairman of the board.

In recording its own deep sense of loss and bereavement, this Assembly expresses its most sincere sympathy with members of the bereaved family.

Mr. Speaker, I so move. Thank you very much.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to add my voice to the passing of Mr. Zipchen, Dick Zipchen, Dmytro, not known to me; but the area he represented is well known to me because that's where I was born and raised. And while Mr. Zipchen sat in this Assembly I was attending high school in North Battleford.

Just a few comments to add to what the Premier has already stated. Mr. Speaker, I understand that while an MLA in the T.C. Douglas government in the '50s, Mr. Zipchen was recognized as truly a committed and hardworking representative of the Redberry constituency, where he worked very hard to bring rural Saskatchewan some of the services that we take for granted today. He pushed hard for the government to spend more money on road development in Redberry. He urged the government to set up financing for rural electrification, proposing a plan that would help farmers pay for installation. That's the kind of committed individual that Mr. Zipchen was.

He honed his political skills at all levels; at the local levels, while serving on school boards, town council, and being the reeve of the RM of Redberry. No doubt his experience as an auctioneer as well served him well when he arrived in Regina in 1952.

Mr. Zipchen died at the age of 90, and as I understand, Mr. Speaker, up until weeks before his death he lived on his own and generously shared his love of gardening with his family and friends.

The province was fortunate to be served by a man so dedicated to his community and to rural Saskatchewan. He will no doubt be greatly missed by his family and our sincere condolences, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the PC caucus, I would like to add our recognition of the life of Dick Zipchen. Mr. Zipchen was a man who gave much to his community and to his province, and although I didn't know Mr. Zipchen personally, his history and reputation speaks for itself. Although born in the Ukraine, he immigrated to freedom in Canada at a young age and was clearly very proud of his adopted home.

Mr. Zipchen's strong interest in politics led him to become a member of this legislature for the Redberry constituency from 1952 until 1956. He further served his community in many ways, including serving as reeve, a school board member, and a founding member of many of the local co-ops.

He was a man who demonstrated through example the kind of life we all strive for — a life dedicated to service and concerns for one's community and province.

I am certain he will be missed by his friends and family scattered throughout this province and country.

On behalf of the PC caucus, I would like to express our deepest and sincere condolences to the Zipchen family. Thank you.

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Late last June, 44 years to the month after his election, the community of Hafford and the surrounding area that encompassed the former Redberry constituency said farewell to one of our special people, Dick Zipchen. Mr. Zipchen came to this part of the world from his birthplace in Horodenko in western Ukraine when he was one year old. His passing was a sad occasion in spite of the fact that we had him for 90 years.

Dick and his family were true early pioneers. They arrived in this part of the world many years before most of the other families in the area arrived from Ukraine. Mr. Zipchen was a very powerful fighter for social justice and his community in particular. He was well known as a powerful and convincing speaker. Dick had only seven years of formal education but was very well self-educated.

He served as a town councillor in Hafford, reeve of the RM of Redberry, and later as the MLA for Redberry constituency.

In the spring of 1952, Redberry was represented by a popular opposition member. Mr. Zipchen knew that Redberry was a very tough seat to win but at his nomination, in which he had warded off two opponents, Mr. Zipchen announced in his acceptance speech that he was healthy, he was big and strong like a bull, and I will fight; I will win.

Well few were convinced. In fact the story goes that Tommy Douglas said to Mr. Zipchen, Dick, if you win Redberry, I'll

walk out barefoot all the way to Hafford to congratulate you. Well about 9 p.m. election night Tommy got a call: Mr. Douglas, get walking. We won.

Well Dick did not always win but he always tried. Many give him the credit for establishing the hospital in Hafford. He was the backbone of virtually every community undertaking for over half a century. Many fondly and respectfully referred to him as "the godfather," and in this case it was an endearing term.

I have talked to Ann Ogenchuk, who worked for Dick when he was in office, and to Eiling Kramer, who was elected the same day as Mr. Zipchen. It is an intriguing experience to listen to these two individuals who knew and admired this man for so many years.

When I was elected to the legislature, we set up our constituency office a short half a block from Mr. Zipchen's home. Many times we met either in his home or in my office. We also miss him driving past the office on his way for coffee or to pick up the mail.

Dick Zipchen was a good friend and a fine man. The community where Dick spent his life is better for the fact that he chose to live there and dedicate his life to family, friends and community, and always politics, to his last days. No higher honour can be bestowed on a man than to serve his fellow man. Dick did just that to the fullest.

(1515)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to use this occasion to pay my tributes to Dmytro "Dick" Zipchen and to his family from a personal point of view. Although I did not get to know Dick Zipchen from a direct, person-to-person contact, I wished I had. I knew of him as a family member and I know that he was influential on people and events who influenced me.

Dick Zipchen was married to Mary Maksymiuk, who was my mother's first cousin. They resided and raised a family in Hafford, as was mentioned earlier. As a young school boy, for me at that time in the '50s, I lived with my parents on a farm midway between North Battleford and Hafford. Although we were in a neighbouring constituency, we had contact with the Redberry constituency and we had contact with Dick Zipchen. We maintained contact because Zipchens were family, and my parents, who lived in that district, also maintained social contact with Hafford through their contacts in the church and the community.

Now I was then very much in my formative years, attending public school, but I can recall what respect was paid in my community to political figures — political figures locally, like Dick Zipchen and Eiling Kramer — and their names were held in esteem along with names like Louis St. Laurent and John Diefenbaker and Tommy Douglas — names that were bigger than life to a young fellow.

There was prestige in having a family member like Dick to be elected to serve the public, either as a reeve or on the school board or in the co-ops or in the credit union or to a provincial government. And it led me to believe that public life was a very honourable challenge, that there was a high responsibility and much was expected of elected people. And with Dick Zipchen, the community's expectations were met.

And I feel, Mr. Speaker, that it was growing up in an atmosphere like this that attracted my respect for working in our parliament, in our government system. When I talked to my parents about Dick, their description of Dick was he was a going concern or he was very active or he had good humour. As previously mentioned by the Premier and those that spoke before me, he was involved in many, many community events, many community activities, and through his work he became known — very well known — in his community and he was influential. He exemplified the value of hard work as was highly valued by many of the Ukrainian pioneers of the time.

So as a family member and as a legislative colleague, I am humbled in paying my respects to Dick Zipchen for his outstanding contribution in community leadership. He was a true social democrat.

I pass on my condolences to his immediate descendants: his son, Roman; his daughters, Patricia and Lucille; and their five grandchildren.

Motion agreed to.

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

Mr. Kowalsky: — By leave of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, to move a procedural motion that would have these tributes transmitted to the family members.

Leave granted.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Regina Northeast:

> That the resolutions just passed, together with a transcript of oral tributes to the memory of the deceased, be communicated to the bereaved families on behalf of this Assembly by Mr. Speaker.

Motion agreed to.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Mr. Wall, seconded by Ms. Lorje, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Krawetz.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the constituents of Saskatoon Sutherland and

a little bit daunting when one sits here and considers the condolences for members past in this Assembly.

I want to extend my best wishes to the new member from the Battlefords as he begins a new session and a new dimension of his professional life, and wish him all the best as he enters the debate here in the Assembly.

I want to begin my remarks today by focusing on what I see as some of the contrasts or contradictions between the parties opposite, particularly the Liberal Party, and the New Democratic Party on this side of the House. And I want to begin with what I see as perhaps the most fundamental difference between the Liberal Party here in Saskatchewan and the governing New Democratic Party. And that quite simply is our approach to fiscal responsibility.

Our commitment to a balanced budget and to an elimination of the deficit and an ongoing eye on the mountain of debt that still needs to be paid down.

How can the Liberal Party propose to deal with the needs and priorities of the people of Saskatchewan, the aspirations of the people of Saskatchewan — as they call for the government to do in their amendment to the Speech from the Throne — when they have no articulation of party policy with respect to the deficit, and the debt, and fiscal responsibility when it is not even mentioned in their news release before the beginning of this session announcing their agenda for this session.

And I'm referring here to the office of the Liberal opposition news release dated February 5, "Jobs renewed focus highlight Liberal opposition agenda." And simply put, in this agenda for the upcoming session which was released a month ago, there is not a peep about a commitment to fiscal integrity as part of their agenda in this session.

In fact the Leader of the Liberal Opposition in the House goes so far as to say, and I quote, "The Liberal opposition hopes to demonstrate to the New Democratic Party that there is more to good governing than balancing the books, and looks forward to underlining this point in the next few short weeks."

Well here we are, Mr. Speaker, and it's no accident that fiscal responsibility is not a part of the Liberal agenda. Months ago it wasn't a part of the agenda. Even a week ago when they held their press conference, a week ago today in this building, a joint press conference with the leader of the party, Dr. Melenchuk and the Leader of the Opposition in the legislature — this gets a little bit confusing having two leaders — but the Leader of the Opposition in the legislature, the member from Canora-Pelly, when asked about what priorities they have for this legislative session by reporters, do not mention fiscal responsibility and the mountain of debt. Can you imagine that from a political party in Saskatchewan when we have gone through what we have gone through these last five years and indeed the last ten years before that with the Tory government of Grant Devine.

I go back to the words of the present Leader of the Liberal Party in the House. The Liberal opposition hopes to demonstrate to the New Democrats that there is more to good governing than balancing the books. Well in one sense I think they're right. In one sense I think they're right that there's more to good governing than simply balancing the books. That certainly is one of the hallmarks of good government, is balancing the books and showing fiscal integrity.

But I want to turn now to a second hallmark for me and for the people of Saskatoon Sutherland that is hallmark of good government, and that is not just talking about child poverty but doing something about child poverty. And in fact, the Liberals don't even address child poverty or changes to the welfare system as part of their agenda for this session either. It's just the cheap talk that they want to offer, as they have the last day or two, about $4 that they're forgoing for one day as a publicity stunt to show their solidarity with the poor.

Well I say that's a wonderful symbolic action and you should be greatly commended for that. That will really change the course of Saskatchewan politics and the plight of the poor here in Saskatchewan. It's a wonderful tokenism that you've given us.

Now the Speech from the Throne quotes the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in this regards, right in the Speech from the Throne, when they wrote:

> To think that almost one Canadian child in five lives in poverty in one of the richest societies in world history is nothing less than a damning indictment of the present socio-economic order.

And this is in Canada that we're talking about, one of the richest societies in world history.

And it's interesting that the Rev. Jesse Jackson, whom we know as a presidential contender in the United States, he recently spoke to over a thousand people at Valparaiso University in the United States to a law symposium, a national symposium, on teenage violence and drug abuse that was sponsored at Valparaiso University. And he made the point that prenatal care and head-start programs for underprivileged children in terms of education and day care are on the front side of an alternative to jail and welfare, which he called on the back side of the problem.

In other words, if we don't deal with things like prenatal care, proper educational start for our young children, and day care on the front side, we're going to be dealing with these children on the back side. And that is why this government has introduced the child action plan here in Saskatchewan — to deal with these problems on the front side so that our children not only have the benefits of attention to these problems here and now, but our children don't have to deal with these social problems in the future.

Reverend Jackson says, and I quote:

> When you cut prenatal care, head start for education, and day care, you increase school drop-outs and anti-social behaviour. The end of that line often leads to premature deaths and jail. These are our children. Shall we lift them up or lock them up? They were not born the way they are. We must do something to put them on the path that leads them to hope and fulfilment and not death and destruction.

(1530)

Now who are the poor here in Canada? Thirteen per cent of two-parent families, we're told, in Canada are poor. The corresponding figure for single-parent females in poverty is almost 60 per cent — 60 per cent of such families in poverty.

How poor are the poor? Well according to the Canadian Council on Social Development, their Campaign 2000 to lift the concern of child poverty across the country, the income of the average poor family with children is $16,700, while the average income for all families with children is $54,800. A gap between 54,000 and 16,000 suggests what poverty might be like for those who endure it.

Another way of looking at it is to say that poor family has about one dollar for every three and a half dollars available to the average family with children . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It sounds like a Liberal lunch budget, one of the members on this side says. It isn't just a one-day lunch budget, it's a way of life for those who have to endure it. Moreover a poor family lives about 50 per cent below the low income cut-off line, which is commonly accepted as the poverty line.

And the costs of being a poor child — dare we talk about this in this Assembly? Well the Liberals wouldn't do it, not in this session. But I will. The cost of being poor. And it doesn't just mean that the poor don't have material goods or money in their pockets. Being poor means that a child of course may miss out on a birthday party. And I've had constituents come to my office on social assistance and tell me what it's like not to be able to send their kids to a birthday party because they don't have the money to buy a present for their child to bring.

Being poor isn't just a matter of not having warm clothing, or not having trips with the school or the hockey team, or nutritious food, or pizza maybe for one day at the school, because they can't afford it. No, being poor isn't just a matter of not having material goods.

A poor child is also more likely to die as a baby, to be sick or to develop physical or develop mental disabilities. And then the family must pay additional costs for medications, special clothing, child care, transportation, and special recreational programs.

Because of illness, poor children miss school more often. By adolescence they often fall behind in both performance and their own hopes for school achievement. They are more likely to drop out before completing high school. And we all know that the devil finds work for idle hands.

And when poor children become adults, what happens? Well they certainly are less likely to find well-paying, secure jobs than those who have been protected from being poor, who have the advantages of good health and education. And this is a loss not only to themselves in terms of potential income and a good lifestyle, but a terrible loss to the people of Canada — all of us. And that is in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bottom line with poverty. Eventually we all pay the price.

It's not just the poor or those who are living on welfare who pay for their poverty. They pay dearly, but we also all pay the price. Taxpayers ultimately must contribute to increased health care costs, special education, facilities, jails, programs which poor children are more likely to need. And our country pays the price of diminished opportunity for each child and for our common future.

So what to do about this? Here in Saskatchewan, New Democrats have said that now is the time to begin to address this problem of poverty. And I'm proud that in this Speech from the Throne it features as one of its major points. One of six major points of the agenda of this government is an attack on child poverty as part of our government's agenda.

The bishops are right. This is a damning indictment of our present social economic order; and here in Saskatchewan, New Democrats are prepared to tackle this problem and to restructure and reorder our society with the help of Saskatchewan people.

The Speech from the Throne notes that the government will continue to make economic development a top priority. This isn't easily done. There are no magic wands or solutions in terms of providing jobs for people. But the Speech from the Throne recognizes that a job is the best way to address child poverty, and a job is the best way to help people escape from the trap of welfare dependency.

A second thing that the government will do, in addition to focusing on jobs — that's one of the primary attacks on poverty — will be to work energetically to implement a new national child benefit plan here in Saskatchewan.

And once, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these changes have been made, these proposed changes have been made, if the federal government will come through with the resolve to make these changes, of the 130,000 Saskatchewan families in our province, a total of 130,000 families, 55,000 of the lowest income families will receive some increased benefit from a new national child benefit program. Some modest benefit. Something to help their children and their life. Whether it's a supplemental health benefit or a child benefit, some concrete, tangible, financial assistance to break the cycle of welfare and poverty, to give them some hope, which is more than a tokenism of living on $4 worth of food for one day is going to give them, pretending that something is being done. No, we're talking about actually doing something in concert with the federal government.

And I say parenthetically here, if the Liberals opposite were really serious about doing something about poverty, they would be talking to their relatives in Ottawa. We don't hear a word. The silence is deafening in terms of their commentary on what the federal government has done to social transfer payments to the provinces and to other social programs.

So here in Saskatchewan, if they can work with their federal counterparts and convince them to act on some of the initiatives that we have brought from Saskatchewan to the federal government, if they can bring themselves to do that, to go beyond the meagre $4 theatrics of today, then one-third of Saskatchewan families can have some tangible concrete help to deal with their problems.

And our government won't stop there with the national child benefit. Pending, pending the national child benefit, the Speech from the Throne announces that our government will further strengthen Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children and will target child poverty, invest in child care in inner city neighbourhoods, in rural communities, and the North, and strengthen child nutritional programs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And I'll have more to say about that later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the action plan for children will continue to be implemented.

Furthermore, the government will introduce amendments to The Saskatchewan Assistance Act to provide incentives to parents to increase their earnings and pursue child maintenance — the whole theory being that there's more money going into families with these changes so that they can provide a better life for themselves and their children.

The government will also introduce legislative amendments that will help youth and low income people to get the training they need through the Youth Futures Program which will assist young people to complete their education and make the transition to the workforce; long-term help to put a new foundation over . . . underneath the lives of Saskatchewan young people. And also a provincial training allowance which will help low income individuals enrolled in adult education programs to better provide for their children.

And it doesn't stop there. We'll amend the family maintenance amendment Act to strengthen provisions for child support here in Saskatchewan. And the youth offender service amendment Act which provides liability protection to volunteers who serve on youth justice committees will be amended to allow people in communities to get involved in helping to solve some of the problems of poverty.

And so here we see, in very concrete fashion, in the Speech from the Throne, as part of the government's agenda, the hallmarks of the difference between a New Democratic administration or an approach to these problems and a Liberal approach to these problems. This is not just a plan that we have, not just word realities — these are real, practical, positive, palpable forms of assistance to those who need them, unlike the Liberals who don't mention poverty as part of their agenda.

And now I want to sketch briefly how damning this refusal to address child poverty really is. I want to begin by putting a face on the problem, by speaking very briefly about a constituent who phoned my office in Saskatoon yesterday after having received one of the Speech from the Throne contact cards or summary cards that was distributed in my constituency. It happens that a woman called yesterday to my office, having taken the time to read the card. And when she read about the government's initiatives to reduce child poverty as I've just talked about, and she read the words, strengthening our action plan for children, enhancing support and prevention services, she thought she needed to phone. She thought she needed to phone. Because while she was getting help now with a parent aid coming into the family through the family support centre — I'll highlight this to the Minister of Social Services; I know he has a special concern for the family support centre in Saskatoon — this particular woman was having a parent aid coming in 16 hours a month, 2 hours twice a week, to help with parenting and problem solving. Without divulging too much of the particulars so that I reveal her particular identity, she had three children, one of whom had a learning disability.

But the real problem in this home was not just the parenting problem. There was a relational problem between her and her husband. She was in an abusive relationship with him; alcohol was involved. And she was seeking to leave her husband for the sake of herself and her three children.

But when reading this little detail about the Speech from the Throne, enhancing support and prevention services, she was afraid that she might be losing the very services that she had now through the family support centre in Saskatoon, and was pleading for assistance, worried that she might lose the lifeline, as slim as it was now in her circumstances, in the future.

She herself had come, apparently, from an alcoholic, abusive home and so she recognized very clearly the need for something to be done in her present home with her children.

This is the personal face of poverty and the need for social programs and social supports for individuals who deal with such problems. This is the personal face of poverty and it's just the tip of the iceberg when we look at the issue Canada-wide.

Because Canada-wide, the number of poor children has increased by 46 per cent in the last seven years. Imagine that. What a damning indictment, as the Canadian bishops say, of our social system and of all of us as politicians; I myself included. That nearly 50 per cent increase in poor children in the country of Canada in the last seven years . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And one member says, rightly so, and this is at a time when collective wealth has grown. And I'll have a few words to say about that in a little while.

Well in the last seven years, almost a 50 per cent growth in poor children. What a wonderful record we have as a country. That was only eight years ago, in 1989, that the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa unanimously passed a resolution vowing to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

(1545)

What a wonderful thought. What a wonderful action, for legislators in Ottawa to vow to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. Well we've got three years to go. With a 50 per cent increase in the last seven years, we have our work cut out for us. And that's precisely the point I'm making. That in this Speech from the Throne we are serious in this government about getting down to work and trying to do something about child poverty in practical, concrete terms here in Saskatchewan. That's where we have to begin as a provincial government.

Since the time that the Parliament of Canada introduced its

pledge or campaign to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, the number of poor two-parent families has increased by 39 per cent. Poor one-parent families have increased by 58 per cent. These are all figures from the Canadian Council on Social Development Monitor. If people want this information, I strongly urge them to contact the government caucus office and we'll see that you get a copy of this information. I'm going to ask people to bear with me a bit because these statistics are very important and bear repetition.

Children in families hit by long-term unemployment have increased by 44 per cent in the last seven years. Children in working-poor families have increased by 17 per cent. Children in families needing social assistance have increased by 68 per cent. Children in unaffordable rental housing have increased by 60 per cent. The only area in which Canada has improved since 1989 and the parliamentary resolve to eliminate poverty is in the rate of infant mortality, which is down by 13 per cent. That's the only area that we've improved. But even there as the Campaign 2000 notes, children in poor families are still twice as likely to die as infants than those in well-off families.

And they go on to write, and I quote: "If this rate of increase in child poverty is allowed to continue," says the Campaign 2000 in its recent annual report, "Canada could enter the new millennium, not with an absence of poor children but with twice the number as in 1989."

It is shocking to think that we as a country, and that we as legislators here in Saskatchewan, or anywhere else, are presiding over this growth in the problem of poverty and not doing anything about it. And that's why we here in Saskatchewan are investing in people.

And what are the Liberal elected members doing about this problem in Ottawa? They're adding to it. They're adding to it. Instead of taking steps to implement the 1989 resolution, the Government of Canada has sharply reduced its funding for programs to benefit children. And this is not a secret; it's known across the country. "The Chrétien government's Canada Health and Social Transfer in particular will have a profound negative impact on children," says Campaign 2000. And it also cites the Liberal's 52 per cent cut in funding for community action program for children and their unfulfilled pledge to set up a national child care program.

"Red book," 1993. Last federal election campaign. A promise for $75 million in a national child care program. A pledge to create 150,000 new, quality child care spaces in 1993. And to date how many have been created? Zero. Zero. And the Prime Minister himself has not responded to requests to establish a child care task force to address this problem.

And should we be surprised, after the federal Liberals have made changes to unemployment insurance that have hurt the poor, cuts to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, replacements of cost sharing through the Canada Assistance Act by block funding through the Canada Health and Social Transfer — all of these changes costing the province of Saskatchewan $67 million in this financial year alone.

And that's why we are picking up the slack. We're doing the work that the federal Liberal Party is unwilling to do; and that we are trying to provide an investment in people through our child action plan and through the Speech from the Throne and the activities of our government in this very legislative session.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — The clear thrust of the last several federal Liberal budgets has been to reduce both the size and the scope of government when it comes to human services. And along with that, there has been a very clear trajectory for individuals and families and the private market to do more in this regard and for the government, the federal government, to do less.
And what's the problem with relying on the market? What's the problem with relying on individuals, individual households, picking up the slack, or the business community?

Well one of the problems with this approach is the assumption underlying it that these other actors have the capacity to pick up the slack, the capacity and/or the willingness to pick up the slack left behind when government pulls out of these activities. And it isn't always possible for people to do this or for the business community to do it, especially if they don't have any breathing space and an individual family is living in poverty.

Different individuals — it's no secret — different families have different capabilities to fend for themselves, and this is because the private market has a good track record of creating wealth but not much interest or capacity in distributing wealth equitably. And that is one of the roles legitimately for government to address.

Canadians over the years clearly and consistently have had a consensus that it is one of the roles of government to address the problem of wealth distribution. But this role has become increasingly difficult as market incomes received by families have become more unequal and disparate. These last years, as I've talked about earlier, as there have been more and more cuts to the social transfer programs of the federal government, it becomes increasingly hard to look after people who are in need, and incomes become more unequal, leaving an increasing gap between those at the top and those at the bottom with people in between squeezed.

I want to say here that there's more shocking news; that the combined wealth of the richest 50 Canadians, all multimillionaires of course, now exceeds $39 billion. If you take the 50 wealthiest Canadians, their wealth collectively exceeds $39 billion according to *The Financial Post* magazine. And if you assume that the annual income of the average poorer family of four is no more than $25,000, this means that the 50 Canadians at the top of the income ladder have more money than five million low income Canadians. The gap is widening here in Canada.

Over the years, the federal government, along with its provincial and local counterparts, as I say, has provided a positive role, a pivotal role in developing social infrastructure and contributing to economic security and social security among Canadians. But what we see happening in the last number of years is that the federal government is pulling out of these programs in a way that the government of Brian Mulroney

could only dream of having done. And part of this has to do with massive give-aways by the federal Liberals to the corporate sector, to banks and financial institutions who bankroll their election campaigns.

Consider for example that according to Statistics Canada, over $17 billion worth of corporate profits went untaxed in Canada in the year 1994, the year for which these statistics are most recently available. Over $17 billion in corporate profits go untaxed. Some 81,000 corporations that are making a profit don't pay any income tax. Well that's maybe nice if you own one of those corporations, one of those 81,000 corporations, but it doesn't speak much for those who are living in poverty. It cries out for tax reform.

The money is there — federally the money is there, in terms of the tax breaks that are being given — but the government isn't there to collect the money federally. Federal health transfers decline; employment training from the federal government is reduced and eliminated; the quality of education is eroded; youth unemployment soars; the benefits for the most vulnerable in our society, the unemployed and welfare recipients, are slashed; and governments both federally and provincially blame their deficits for these cut-backs and proclaim that the pain and anguish they cause are for the public's own good.

But that hasn't happened here. In the five years that the New Democratic government has been elected we have not cut social service payments to social service recipients, to our credit. And we aren't prepared to do it now either, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The same day that the media announced a wage roll-back in Ontario for low-paid child care workers, we saw the spectacle of Canadian banks boasting of massive profits even exceeding the record sums that they had accrued the year before. This is the reality of what's happening in our country.

And then we see the federal Auditor General reveal that two family trusts were permitted to transfer at least $2 billion worth of assets out of Canada without paying a cent of tax on the gains they had accumulated.

An Hon. Member: — Yes, that's a lot of $4 a day.

Mr. Koenker: — That's a lot of $4 a day, a member says on this side of the House. Two billion dollars worth of family trust assets transferred out of Canada, allowed by the federal government. No tax paid on it, according to the Auditor General of Canada — a policy of the federal Liberals.

Subsequently, it was revealed that these trusts belonged to the Bronfman family. Estimates of the federal and provincial taxes legally avoided by their transactions are as high as $75 million worth of taxation forgone by the federal Liberals.

And instead of thanking the Auditor General for bringing this matter to light, what did the Liberal members of the Common's Finance Committee do? They denounced him for making this revelation. And now, reluctantly, the Chrétien government assures us that we won't allow this to happen any more. Not again. Aren't we fortunate?

The point is that there's sufficient money in Canada to maintain and even improve our social programs while we are dealing with the deficit. We've proved that here in Saskatchewan. We know that that is true federally as well. There's sufficient money to maintain and improve our social programs, but there are too many tax loopholes besides the family trusts that should be closed, and too many cuts from the federal government to social programs in our country, and no willingness for members on the opposite side to take responsibility for poverty as part of their agenda for this legislative session.

(1600)

I want to talk now about where we go from here. I want to say that here in Saskatchewan we have dealt with our financial deficit, we have balanced our budget, and now is the time to attack the social deficit, to invest in people, to bring balance not just to our finances but to bring balance to the problem of child poverty. And we're going to do this not only because it's the right thing to do but because it's the only sensible thing for us to do.

Our long-term prosperity and the long-term collective welfare of this province can easily be derailed if we become obsessed with the short-term fiscal considerations at the expense of investments in people, in health and in education, and in security for children.

And so New Democrats will continue to insist that the federal government plays a key role in safeguarding our social and economic security programs for Canadians, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable. And if the Liberals don't want to talk about child poverty, I say they don't deserve to govern this province . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the member opposite asked what I'm doing about it right now. I'm at least talking about it, and I'm going to tell you — not just talk about it — I'm going to tell you what we've done.

Okay. The action plan for children, Mr. Member opposite, the action plan for children is now in its fourth year. That's what we've done. Addressing child poverty, $10 million in new initiatives under the action plan. In 1994-95, $4.4 million in new money for prevention initiatives, preschool pilot projects, and prevention . . . early intervention community projects, initiatives to support vulnerable children and families such as family violence outreach, legal aid enhancements, province-wide expansion of unified family court, assistance to child victims and witnesses. That's what we did about poverty four years ago.

Three years ago, $1.9 million in initiatives related to child care, new initiatives, support for young mothers, treatment for adolescent offenders, remote housing projects, and bridging to support single parents.

And this last year, $4.2 million in initiatives — new initiatives related to the expansion of community schools, Indian and Metis education programs, increased support to children in schools with special needs, enhanced measles immunization program, child care initiatives, expansion to post-adoption programs to assist requests for information, and community-based youth justice pilot projects.

The child action plan has worked across departmental lines to provide two and a half million dollars in funding for community schools and for Indian and Metis education development programing; a million dollars in increased support for students with special needs; child care initiatives of over half a million dollars and post-adoption programs, and the list goes on, as I've mentioned . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Street workers in North Battleford, as the member will know.

And this is a record of accomplishment. These aren't things that we're going to do; these are things that have been done by this government. At the very same time that we have been balancing the province's finances and dealing with the financial deficits, we've been dealing with the human deficits as well, and we've been investing in people.

It's a record to be proud of, and this reflects the commitment to better the needs of our children and youth despite the problems we face. And we renew our commitment to do this in this legislative session again in the Speech from the Throne, to provide in the child action program a long-term strategy to invest in our children and youth.

I want to share just some of the initiatives that have been happening in and around Saskatoon in this regard. In Delisle, with the Delisle family tenant association, $2,000 given for programing to socially and economically disadvantaged children between the ages of two and four. In Dundurn, $5,000 for at-risk children and youth, a summer education and recreation program for at-risk children who are five to eighteen years.

In another program in Saskatoon at the King George community summer, a mentorship program in Saskatoon; $5,000 in funding to maintain the mentorship program of one-to-one mentorship to socially isolated children identified by the school for the summer months so that they don't languish over the summer. The program is intended to strengthen and create positive adult-child relationships, enhance children's self-esteem and confidence, and create opportunities for at-risk children to participate in social, leisure, and cultural activities.

And the list goes on and on. I have, I think it's 14 pages with almost a hundred examples of funding projects in and around Saskatoon that have been aimed at child poverty. Saskatoon communities for children in conjunction with the Saskatoon (West) School Division is a joint planning mechanism to provide services to children from birth years to 12 years of age, involving community organizations in the Saskatoon region that serve and advocate on behalf of children and their families, partnering with government organizations to deliver services to children.

Abused women support groups to prevent the incidence of family violence and act in partnership with abused women so that they can learn to support their children and to provide a stable environment for them and to ensure that they have well-being.

In fact even in the University of Saskatchewan, $10,000 in funding for a physical activity program for children with special needs, children from inner city schools, as part of their regular school day to participate in this program for children at risk.

Reading for Success programs in Confederation Park in Saskatoon aimed specifically at low income, single parent, aboriginal, and immigrant families. A Healthy Start food security program to ensure that infants and children in low income families have access to nutritious foods and other resources needed for a good start in life. Parents participate in life skills training to help them learn how to cook on a collective basis and do bulk buying of food items.

And in my own community of Sutherland, an aboriginal outreach program which funds an aboriginal outreach worker to work with families of aboriginal ancestry in Sutherland and to increase understanding of poverty issues in the community.

These are all actions that are being taken by our government here in Saskatchewan to address poverty and better the lives of children in our province.

This Speech from the Throne, in opening the session of the legislature, is all about investing in people. We're going to show in this session that this government doesn't just talk about doing things for children in poverty, but actually does things for them — passing legislation and allocating funding to deal with these problems.

And we can do this, we can provide long-term solutions because we have built a solid, rock-solid foundation of financial responsibility so that we can take these steps and deal with these programs and problems.

And so we are investing in people. We are dealing, as Rev. Jesse Jackson said, with the problem on the front side so that we don't have to deal with it on the back side. We are lifting up our children during this legislative session so we don't have to lock them up sometime later in their life.

And that is why I will be supporting the Speech from the Throne, and why I have condemned the federal government and many of the members opposite for their complicity in the destruction and the dismantling of our social welfare system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Chairman, I wish first of all to say what an honour it is for me to represent the North Battleford constituency, even if it is only on an interim basis, as hon. members opposite keep telling me.

The city of North Battleford, together with the communities of Prince, Cochin, Meota, and the first nations communities of Saulteaux and Moosomin make up some of the best scenery and the finest people in the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — And had it not been for Governor Dewdney buying up a bunch of land in the Pile O' Bones area, we would still be the capital of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chairman, I'm extremely pleased to note that my enthusiasm for North Battleford is shared by hon. members opposite. Mr. Speaker, so much do they enjoy our wonders that last fall most of them camped in North Battleford for an entire month.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — And the weather wasn't even that great. They enjoyed our unparalleled scenery. They enjoyed our colourful history and the warm hospitality of our people even if they found us a trifle independent and quite able to make up our own minds.

Mr. Chairman, my friends opposite will soon have another opportunity to come to the Battlefords. We are making a bid to host the Saskatchewan Summer Games in the year 2000, and I want to personally invite each and every member to join with me in North Battleford in celebrating the first Saskatchewan games of the new millennium. However, Mr. Speaker, if I may make clear, the invitation to come back to my constituency is for the year 2000 and not 1999.

I want to thank all members of this Assembly for the gracious way they have welcomed me, and I want to say that I am pleased to note that policy differences inside the House are not allowed to become personality differences outside the House.

I also want to thank especially my colleagues and to say how proud I am to be associated with them. I keep looking for signs of the mean-spiritedness the NDP claim to have noted and I detect none. I see only men and women dedicated to the betterment of Saskatchewan and its people.

And, Mr. Speaker, last but far from least, I wish to give my personal thanks to you in helping me learn the ropes and get settled. I am very much aware that many fine people come from Moose Jaw. In fact, I was born there myself.

Mr. Speaker, during the recent by-election, the NDP ran ads saying a Liberal member of the legislature would be useless. While I freely concede that my value to this House is yet to be proven, residents of my area are concerned that in the nearly a year since Doug Anguish resigned, the Premier has not seen fit to name any of his members of the NDP caucus to the cabinet seat traditionally reserved for the north-west.

(1615)

I would like to pay tribute to my two opponents in the recent by-election. In an age of cynicism about politics and politicians, I am pleased to say there was nothing done, in my view, to bring disrepute on the democratic process. For the Conservative candidate, I had considerable sympathy. He worked hard, but it was clear from an early point that no matter what he did, voters are simply not ready for a repeat performance of the Devine comedy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Conservative voters unhappy with the present direction of this province understand clearly that they have no realistic alternative but to join forces with the Liberal Party. The Conservative candidate tried to make an issue of the provincial sales tax and the devastating effect it has, especially on the western part of the province. But he could not get beyond the obvious point that if his party had not left our province's finances in such a perilous state, taxes wouldn't have to be so high.

The NDP candidate was gracious and decent, though at times the scripts he was given to read were a bit puzzling. One minute he would be claiming there had been absolutely no health cuts at all, that bed closures and staff lay-offs were an illusion; the next moment he would argue that all the cut-backs in health were because of the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, leave aside that these two arguments are contradictory. Leave aside the extra hundred million in new revenue the province receives from the VLTs. Leave aside the record provincial revenues from oil lease sales. Leave aside the millions this province saves as a result of lower interest charges on our debt — a direct result of the fiscal policies of the Hon. Paul Martin.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Leave all of these factors aside and people are becoming increasingly aware that other provinces suffering under the yoke of the same federal government as we are doing a much better job of protecting basic services.

Almost everywhere people continue to have some faith in the governmental process. They believe their government can and should be doing something besides whining about Ottawa and claiming they are powerless to effect any change.

Mr. Speaker, if that were really true, why would we have a provincial government at all? It is little wonder that many people in North Battleford who told me they had never voted any way other than NDP decided they just couldn't do it this time.

Mr. Speaker, those people told me they hadn't changed. They hadn't left the NDP; they feel the NDP has left them. The only responsible and moderate choice is the Liberal Party.

Since I joined this House I think a couple of debates have already focused the difference between our three parties. The first has been the issue of youth crime in Regina that has so concerned many people. On the one side, the NDP minimized the problem and appear indifferent. To the extent they admit there is any problem at all, they just shrug their shoulders and say, blame Ottawa. Then there are the Conservatives who appear to argue that if we would lock up all our young people and throw away the key, there would be no one left to steal cars. Only the Liberals provide that middle, reasonable, positive voice of sanity between the two wild extremes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Then there's the issue of child poverty. We are concerned in this province that every day of the year residents

of group homes and SARCAN clients have to survive on a $4 a day food budget. We have decided that we are going to make a statement by trying to do that for one day.

An Hon. Member: — That's a trivial thing.

Mr. Hillson: — Okay, that . . . the hon. member says that's trivial. Frankly I agree it's a small sacrifice for us to make, going one day without adequate food, sitting in the cafeteria watching hon. members opposite with their trays heaped and overflowing as they said to us, what's your point, there's no problem here, as another sandwich and stew fell on the floor. Yes, it's a small sacrifice but it was a sacrifice we were prepared to make and they weren't.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Since my election, I have continued to receive many calls from people who are in pain and have had their surgery delayed for months and months while operating rooms are closed for lack of funds.

Our new leader, Dr. Melenchuk, has said the he would allow private facilities to reduce waiting-lists, provided there is no extra billing and the entire bill is covered by medicare. The NDP finds this scary. They would rather have no treatment at all than have private treatment, even if it is fully covered within the public system with no extra charges. Why is it preferable to have nothing instead of something?

Yet while the NDP claim to be against any private care, they have de-insured one service after another, many of the same services which are covered in other provinces. Look at the list, Mr. Speaker: the children's dental program — gone; the drug plan — largely gone; insulin coverage — gone; oxygen coverage — gone; assistance for couples having difficulty conceiving for *in vitro* or reverse sterilization — gone; eye examination — gone. The NDP still wants to run on the successes of 30 years ago, but the people are more concerned about today.

Mr. Speaker, in the past few months I have spoken to countless people who have informed me that they have always supported the NDP because they believed that party would protect health care. Instead, we have a government which excels at nothing so much as making excuses and shifting blame — blaming Ottawa because it can no more spend money it doesn't have than we can is not a substitute for policy and innovation. The people are tired of being told that we have to cut beds and lay off nurses and close hospitals, but, Mr. Speaker, the NDP still has money left over to distribute comic books telling the people how great our health care system is. People are convinced that we do have the money to protect basic services. What the government lacks is a sense of commitment and priorities.

Mr. Speaker, people are concerned with the direction of SaskPower and SaskEnergy, our Crown corporations that the people of this province have traditionally been proud of and have believed have given them good service. But now they want to know why all the increases in rates after the government said there wouldn't be any and after these same corporations piled up huge profits ranging from 50 to $100 million.

They wonder why SaskPower invested 31 million in the cooperative republic of Guyana, one of the most indebted countries in the world. What is the purpose of this investment, Mr. Speaker? Is it foreign aid? Is it an attempt for us to get rich on the backs of some of the poorest people in the world? Do our utility rate increases have anything to do with this investment? Is our hard-earned money in danger of ending up in a sink-hole in the Amazonian forest?

I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the provincial sales tax and its effect on my part of the province. Of course the 9 per cent sales tax is a problem everywhere, but particularly in western Saskatchewan. People vote with their feet and their cars as to whether they choose to pay it.

The Minister of Finance has said many times that reducing the sales tax even one point would cost the province $80 million in lost revenue. My question for her is how much revenue do we lose every day by people driving to Lloydminster, Medicine Hat, Grand Centre, and Edmonton to do their shopping.

How many telephone orders are placed from Saskatchewan to Alberta companies and delivered into Saskatchewan with phoney invoices indicating Alberta pick-ups? How many boat and trailer, snowmobile and trailer, or ATV (all-terrain vehicle) and trailer purchases have the invoices split so that a Saskatchewan resident bringing back goods from Alberta can license the trailer without having to disclose the rest of the purchase and pay tax on the balance of the purchase?

In short, Mr. Speaker, we know how much is coming in the front door with the provincial sales tax, but do we have any idea at all about how much we are losing out the back door? I suspect the answer is that the provincial government hasn't got a clue and doesn't want to find out.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP is fond of saying that we in Saskatchewan are a special breed; that we are tougher than other Canadians, and I agree. Indeed the truth of this came home last summer when my daughter and I went on a trip. In other provinces we would see red flags or bump signs along the roads and then nothing would happen.

In Saskatchewan a bump flag means tramp on the brakes, grab the steering wheel, brace yourself, and hang on for dear life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, we in Saskatchewan are made of sterner stuff. Frankly, I worry. I worry that when the Liberals become government — oh, when the Liberals become government — maybe our people will become soft as they become accustomed to driving on smooth roads; when wellness means something other than you don't dare get sick; when job opportunity means something besides having to leave the province.

Yesterday the hon. member for Saskatchewan Southeast, in her excellent speech, described the government as, and I quote, "plodding." I completely agree. She also said that it was wrong to live with hope. With that statement I couldn't disagree more.

The NDP may think that hope is unimportant or even destructive, but the Liberal caucus knows the truth of the saying: without hope, the people die.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — A recent Government of Saskatchewan survey asked our residents several questions about health care. The results, I should say, were not all bad for the government. In fact the results disclosed that most people continue to be reasonably satisfied with the level of care they receive.

Then came the kicker. People were asked what they expect in the future. A staggering 67 per cent replied that they expect our health care system to deteriorate in the next 10 years. Only 10 per cent said they expected improvement. There is the problem in a nutshell. I suspect if the question had been asked on any other possible question except perhaps the gambling industry, the answer would have been the same. People expect deterioration. People no longer have confidence in the future under this government.

(1630)

Mr. Speaker, we have been called next-year country because throughout our history we have been sustained by the belief that no matter what the problems of today, tomorrow will be better. But lately we have been losing that confidence that our children will have the best of schools, that we will drive on roads as good as any on the continent, that our young people can stay and build lives here with something to look forward to besides responsibility for a crushing debt, that our seniors will be looked after. We must recapture the sense of hope and optimism that built this province if we are to move forward.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. members opposite say I have a tough act to follow as MLA for North Battleford. I agree. But I say to them, Anguish is out, hope is in; the Liberal caucus will work for a better tomorrow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise in my place and take part in this debate. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that at the conclusion of this debate, I will be voting against the amendment and in support of the motion to accept the Speech from the Throne for the second session of the twenty-third legislature.

I would like to acknowledge the fact that it is good to be back in this Chamber and to interact with my colleagues. I also wish to greet the opposition members, especially the new member from North Battleford.

Saskatchewan people deserve to stand proud for their accomplishments over the last five years. Their support and understanding was an absolute must as our government dealt with a difficult situation, to say the least. But with their help, great progress is being made and once again Saskatchewan people have created opportunity.

I am pleased to say that here in Saskatchewan our provincial government has a clear path laid out to prepare this province for the 21st century. We as a government have done extremely well over the last nearly five and a half years. The good management of our government has established Saskatchewan once again as a good place to live and do business.

Our health services are once again number one in the country and constantly improving as health reform takes place, thanks to the good management and additional funding from our provincial government and no thanks to the federal Liberals with their cuts to transfer payments to Saskatchewan health, education, and social services.

My constituency of Redberry Lake is enjoying much better times in recent years. The farm situation is considerably improved with good crops for the most part and somewhat better prices. I am very pleased with the progress made on the twinning of the Yellowhead. If all goes well, by this time next year the stretch from Saskatoon to North Battleford will be complete. This includes a second new bridge at the Borden crossing.

I am pleased to say that while in order to handle today's larger units and heavier traffic, a second, modern bridge is being constructed, the beautiful old bridge with its triple arch construction is remaining in place. This bridge has been part of the landscape and has served us well since 1937. While the design is different, the Borden bridge still spans the North Saskatchewan River and is truly a bridge between the communities surrounding my home and the rest of the province.

The Borden bridge has been a focal point for many of us for years, as a lot of us feel a personal connection. I rarely cross that river that I don't remember my uncle, who worked on the construction of the original Borden bridge, which opened in 1937.

In fact I have a connection that goes back some 90 years to the nearby CP-CNR (Canadian Pacific-Canadian National Railway Company) railway bridge where my grandfather served as a sectionman. Safety was not so great a concern in those days and he told the story of being caught out on the bridge with the rest of the crew when an unexpected freight train suddenly appeared. They sat on the end of the ties, high over the water, and let the train go by. As he was not able to swim, I expect his fingerprints are still visible in the ties.

I am extremely pleased that the Green Certificate program that I was instrumental in having introduced as an agricultural apprenticeship course has been extremely well received, with over 140 trainees becoming involved since its inception.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — This program has all the ingredients to be an exceptional success as it has a low cost arrangement with a total industry commitment, as well as recognition in several school divisions as an accredited course at the present time.

This is one training program that most often sees family members working together and does not require huge expenditures on bricks and mortar. The interest is increasing

and I believe it will become even more important to the entire industry as time passes.

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the reeve and councillors from the rural municipality of Douglas, No. 436, for their cooperation with the Department of Highways in undertaking the maintenance of a portion of Highway 376. These are the kind of arrangements that require cooperation of both levels of government and benefit us all.

Due to the changes in rail transportation, more and more burden for heavy-haul road is going to fall on municipal and provincial governments. The federal government completely abdicated its responsibility in the last budget with more offloading onto Saskatchewan residents.

A great many of my constituents are extremely pleased that Saskatchewan is once again showing leadership with the introduction of the first legal chelation clinics in the country, in cooperation with the college of physicians and surgeons. These new clinics will allow Saskatchewan residents to receive their treatment in their home province without expensive travel and with the assurance that everything is all legal and above board. The health of Saskatchewan people is our top priority. Chelation treatment is just one more step.

I am very pleased, as are most Saskatchewan farmers, with the major changes to crop insurance. First of all, the province paid off our share of the crop insurance deficit, which allowed lower premiums, and the whole program has been simplified, which cuts down on the paperwork and allows clear understanding of available coverage, including spot-loss hail insurance.

I attended several of the crop insurance informational meetings and the farmers of the Redberry Lake constituency were well pleased with the changes. A large number of my farmers are becoming involved in game farming. This interesting new approach to livestock production is providing new opportunities for many rural residents. It is extremely interesting and generally profitable work to work with these beautiful animals. I believe there is a brilliant future in rural Saskatchewan in this unique, new livestock business.

Every indication is evident that the hog production is about to make a huge expansion in this province. Beef numbers are up, and sheep and wool production is on the rise. Farmers are generally optimistic as spring of 1997 approaches, and I believe we are all well poised to make great strides forward in the years to come. 1997 promises to be an even greater year in my constituency for tourism, with travel up and new tourist attractions becoming more accessible.

While I'm on my feet I want to pass a few comments on a major problem created by Ottawa that impacts negatively on our province, and in fact limits the amount of good news that we can expect in any throne speech. We were led to believe by successive Tory and Liberal governments that our greatest hold-up to progress for Saskatchewan farmers was the Crow rate. If only the Crow were gone, secondary industry would blossom and grain movement would be enhanced, we were told. Never again would we would experience disruptions in the grain movement.

Our Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation minister expressed outrage at the news that the federal government is giving the railways the right to charge more for hauling grain. He said in his news release on March 7, and I quote:

> "Farmers have been watching their grain sit on (the) sidings for weeks and sometimes months . . . as a result of (our) . . . unprecedented backlog in the grain handling system (and) are being forced to pay $15 million . . . in demurrage." . . . "Now, as a result of the legislative changes made by the federal government in the past few years, the railways will be rewarded with a raise, estimated at $15 million per year. This is completely unacceptable."
>
> The Canadian Transportation Agency yesterday announced an increase of 1.5 per cent to the cost of capital formula for the railways. This change will result in a net increase in freight charges on grain of approximately $15 million per year.
>
> (Our minister said) "Allowing the railways to increase their rates is a slap in the face to every western producer," . . .
>
> "The federal government must immediately move to amend the *Canada Transportation Act* to recreate a proper balance between the needs of shippers and railways and to ensure that additional unwarranted costs to producers are removed. Anything less than this is unacceptable," . . .

Such things as car shortages and demurrage charges would be a thing of the past — or at least that's what they said. Those federal government Liberals did all that to us, even though they knew if they left it — and this was some years ago — that the Tories would have done it to us anyway. So it doesn't really matter whether the Tories or the Liberals are in Ottawa, we in the West get the short end of the stick.

Secondary and value added, all those good terms that we all use, are important. But we should remember that at the time of the death of the Crow, we were processing about seven and one-half per cent of our production on the Prairies — such things as feed lots, crushing plants, and malt processing. Double that, and we still have to ship 85 per cent of our production. That's 85 per cent at the much higher rate while we still face railcar shortages and demurrage charges.

The throne speech outlines many progressive moves our government is making to compensate for Ottawa's lack of foresight. Ottawa Liberals, like Saskatchewan Liberals, are just recycled Tories.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Neither group supports Saskatchewan farmers as they face such things as lack of rail service. Perhaps the words of the late Justice Emmett Hall will prove accurate, with these folks in charge, when he said, and I quote: "If the Crow goes, buffalo will once again roam the prairies."

Be it the sorry Tories, or the Liberals who seem to be able to justify anything and never be sorry, we often find ourselves victimized as Saskatchewan farmers. Not victimized, as some

would have you believe, by other Canadians elsewhere in the country, but victimized by both foreign and Canadian corporations who are more interested in corporate profits than the well-being of Canadian people.

These same corporations are often contributors to both those sorry Tories, and the Liberals who don't seem to realize when they should be sorry. Last summer I had the opportunity to take part in an excursion to the Port of Churchill. I was extremely impressed with the potential of the port — potential is the key word; other words, such as neglect, come to mind.

Here is a seaport, an actual prairie seaport, that because of the neglect of Liberal and Tory governments has never reached its true potential.

(1645)

The Canadian dream well over a hundred years ago was a country united coast to coast, joined by rail. Now we have a federal government who is totally fragmenting the rail system, such as the Churchill example. Can the fragmentation of the country be far behind?

Short-line rail systems, even American short-lines, may be the only links we as shippers have to port. So I don't wish to be critical of their contribution. What I am critical of is a government that would not only allow but encourage such a fragmented system to exist. Our ancestors fought tremendous obstacles to create such Canadian institutions as national railways, national airlines, and the Canadian Wheat Board.

What we need from Ottawa is a vision of what is needed to prepare us for the 21st century, such a vision as that shown in the Speech from the Throne read in this Chamber on March 6. Today we get only Liberal governments in Ottawa completing Mulroney's destructive Tory policies, and they aren't even sorry.

We often hear about national unity. Perhaps we should elect a national government with a national agenda instead of returning the Liberals to continue to destroy what was once the Canadian dream.

I mentioned Churchill and the fact that the rail line needs some repairs, and so do the port facilities. In the overall scheme of things, neither cost need be that significant.

I just want to take this opportunity to explain why the governments in Ottawa never supported the port the way that it should have been. Well Canadian people owned the railway through the CN (Canadian National) and also owned the port. Our government would have, I suspect, put millions into the upgrading required of the rail and the port facilities had they just been owned by their corporate friends.

We often hear the strong call for national unity. Well Saskatchewan people would respond a lot quicker if our national government had our interests in mind instead of some corporate agenda.

In conclusion I would just like to paraphrase a few of the opening comments from the throne speech. Through cooperation, community and shared effort, Saskatchewan is back on its feet. Our agricultural industry is rapidly diversifying. Our resource sector is strong; trade is growing; investment in oil, gas, mining, and forestry is booming. The value added industries of tomorrow, like equipment manufacturing, food processing and ag-biotech have never been stronger.

For the first time in almost a decade, more people are moving to Saskatchewan than moving away. It's a remarkable turnaround — a turnaround mirrored in our province's public finances. This year my government will present for your consideration a fourth consecutive balanced budget.

Thirty-five years ago Saskatchewan gave Canada public universal health care. Today the people of Saskatchewan are making another, perhaps equally important, contribution to our country. We are setting a new example, pioneering a new model. We are showing that people who hold true to values of cooperation, community, mutual aid, and responsibility can return from the brink of bankruptcy; can preserve and renew the foundations of civil society like medicare and education; and can build a growing, competitive, high-employment economy without regressive transfers from the poor to the rich and without undermining essential supports for our family.

We have done well as a government, as a province, as a people, to have progressed to the present situation. We are well poised to enter the next century with the direction that was outlined in last Thursday's throne speech. I am proud to stand in this legislature and vote against the amendment and vote in favour of the 1997 throne speech. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you and what a pleasure it is to be back in this Assembly with my friends and my colleagues and stand in my place to support the Speech from the Throne. Welcome back to all of you and a special welcome to the new member, the member from North Battleford.

It's a pleasure to see you again as well, Mr. Speaker. I know that your wise counsel will guide us in this session as it did in the previous session.

I would also like to welcome our new pages. Their job is a very important one and all of us appreciate the work that they do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member from Swift Current for his eloquent speech, the one he delivered in moving the Speech from the Throne. His words were clever, witty, relevant, and beautifully presented, an inspiration to all of us who follow. Well done.

And what a pleasure it was to listen to the member from Saskatoon Southeast in seconding the motion. Her comments are always thought-provoking and challenging and she did not disappoint. Congratulations to you on a speech well delivered.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it really is wonderful to be in this House again and stand in my place to represent the fine people of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. No matter how many times you do this, it is thrilling. The feeling is almost impossible to describe, but it makes me very aware of what it means to live in a parliamentary democracy, and I cherish that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — I would like to say a few words about my constituency and the good people who live there. It includes the north-west portion of the city of Regina, as well as the rural communities of Lumsden and Grand Coulee. It also encompasses the many farm families living east, north, and west of Regina for several miles. And it's growing, Mr. Speaker, just like the population of Saskatchewan.

More people are moving in. Contractors are building new homes; entrepreneurs are opening new businesses. In some months I have sent out as many as 16 letters to new business people, welcoming them to our community. And last year, Winston Knoll Collegiate opened its doors to 645 students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — The constituency contains many fine restaurants where you can eat a variety of dishes, from traditional to ethnic. It has an active professional community — doctors, chiropractors, lawyers, therapists, dentists, and others. The retail trade is also well represented, the Co-op grocery store in the Sherwood Mall being a good example. We also have pharmacies, clothing stores, hardware stores, convenience stores, and gas stations.

There is a vibrant cultural community in Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, Mr. Speaker. We have writers, sculptors, potters, painters and printmakers, and artists who work with wool and fabric. Lumsden alone is home to many talented artisans, including Mac and Beth Hone, both accomplished painters and printmakers who have achieved a national reputation. Mac Hone won the Saskatchewan Arts Board's lifetime achievement award last year and it was an award well deserved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — If you want to pursue recreational activities we have the facilities for you. The North West Leisure Centre as well as the rec centre in Lumsden and Grand Coulee means you can swim, skate, or curl; you can also bowl and play pool. There are several parks in our constituency, small neighbourhood parks as well as larger provincial parks like Condie and Wascana Trails. We also have two challenging golf courses and of course many productive and well-kept farms.

It is always a pleasure to visit the schools in our area, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank them for inviting me to take part in their many activities. I also want to congratulate them on the many projects that they undertake, from environmental programs like Clean Cat which encourages schools to become green; to safety programs about bicycles and taking care on the streets; to hosting Canadian citizenship courts, and developing partnerships with Crown corporations like SaskTel, SaskPower, SGI and other businesses.

Riffel High and the separate school board have partnered with SaskTel to allow all their students access to other students in schools throughout Regina via the Internet. Winston Knoll has a state of the art computer lab as well as facilities for films and video making, drama productions, food preparation, and shops for metal and woodworking. St. Angela Merici School and I have a partnership ourselves to deliver my monthly constituency newsletter. Not only does this help the students appreciate participatory democracy, but the funds raised benefit the entire school.

There are other fine schools in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, in Grand Coulee and Lumsden as well as Regina, and they too are involved in their own creative and innovative projects. And all our students have the dedicated, knowledgeable, and energetic teachers that they need and deserve.

So I thank again the people who have chosen me to represent them. I thank them for their phone calls, their letters, and their visits, and I thank them for their welcome when I drop by their homes or place of business. And I hope that they will continue to share their ideas and their concerns with me, because when that happens we have participatory democracy at its best.

Now what can the good people of my constituency, what can the good people of Saskatchewan expect from this government? Well they can expect good government. They can expect that the priorities of this government will be the priorities of the people of this province. And they can expect that this government, through the MLAs on this side of the House, will continue the proud Saskatchewan tradition of sharing, of cooperation, of innovation, of achievement, to create together a strong and vibrant community.

Mr. Speaker, this is a time of real hope and optimism in this province. As the throne speech says, today is "one of the most hopeful times in our province in many years." And why is that, Mr. Speaker? It is because all the hard work and sacrifice of the people of this fine province over the last five years have brought us here to this time of optimism. Difficult times and tough choices have brought us here.

The throne speech outlines where we are and where we are going. We are building Saskatchewan together. And we are building together, Mr. Speaker, by investing in people.

Our priorities are very clear: to create meaningful jobs for today and tomorrow – that's our first priority; to provide quality education and training, building the best possible education system; to tackle child poverty and reform the social welfare system; to protect medicare and deliver a stable, secure and caring health system; to rebuild our transportation system to meet the needs of a growing economy and to address the long-term sustainability of our highways; and, Mr. Speaker, to continue to maintain our fiscal integrity, sound and compassionate financial management.

Our priorities, Mr. Speaker — our priority is to build Saskatchewan together.

Now I know that my colleagues in government have spoken eloquently on these priorities and I also know that those who speak after me will do so as well, but I would like to focus on one of those priorities for the remainder of my comments. I'd like to talk a little bit about health care and health renewal.

We all know the history of our health renewal process — reducing the over 400 boards to 30 districts where the people who live in those districts make the decisions about their health care needs; community-based, recognizing that health care is more than a building, more than bricks and mortar, as our Premier often says.

Health care is more than being cared for when you are ill. Health care is education and prevention. Health care is about having a job. Health care is about staying in your community. Health care is about support programs for seniors and new mothers. Health care is about providing respite services and palliative care. Health care is about counselling. Health care is about knowing that emergency services are available for you.

Mr. Speaker, good health care is knowing that the services you need will be there when you need them. And because health care remains a top priority for this government, they will be. We will continue to invest in our health system, to ensure that the people of Saskatchewan have access to not only the best wellness and prevention programs, but also the best health care and treatment services we can provide.

Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to chair our government caucus committee on health, social policy, and justice. And a very fine committee it is, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of the work the members of that committee have done and are continuing to do.

(1700)

We meet regularly with groups and organizations and professionals who work in the health care field. And one of the things that impresses me — impresses all of us on the committee — is how dedicated these people are and how committed they are to the concept of wellness. They meet with us to share what they are doing and to offer ideas on how we can do things differently, and even suggestions on how to do things better. They often express their appreciation to the government for the work that is being done in health renewal. Meeting with these people and learning about what they do is very inspirational and very educational.

And while we recognize that we must continue to work on renewing our health care system, I think it's also important to recognize how far we have come. More health services are available in Saskatchewan communities than ever before: prenatal nutrition, diabetes education, blood pressure clinics, province-wide breast cancer screening, and palliative care programs, to name a few.

Saskatchewan is well served by hospitals and nursing homes. We still have twice as many hospitals per capita as the national average, and the number of nursing home beds per person over 75 years of age is higher than many other provinces. We are meeting the needs of our growing seniors' population with expanded home care and other programs. Community- and home-based services help people stay independent longer.

All districts now have mental health, public health and addiction workers. We have increased minority and women's representation on district health boards. And did you know, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan life expectancy is higher than the Canadian average and that for women it is the highest in Canada? We must be doing something right in this province.

I could continue, Mr. Speaker, because there is so much more that could be said, not just about our health renewal process, but also about the other priorities of this government that I mentioned earlier in my remarks. But I know that there are many others who wish to speak.

But before I take my place, may I say again that this is a time of real hope and optimism in Saskatchewan. A time to build Saskatchewan together. A time to build a new economy and create meaningful jobs. A time to provide progressive education, compassionate social programs, and a health care system that is all-inclusive and always there. A time to develop a comprehensive transportation plan, and a time to protect Saskatchewan's hard-earned fiscal freedom for generations to come.

And we're going to do that, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to support the Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — I look forward to entering into the debate on the Speech from the Throne. I'm also sure the members opposite are waiting with bated breath to hear my views on the speech. But as I have quite a number of remarks and the time does not permit today, I move that the debate be adjourned for today.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

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