

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of concerned citizens of Saskatchewan with respect to young offenders' crimes, I read the prayer on this petition:

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 a 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.

The signatures are mostly from people in Regina, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I bring petitions forward on behalf of people in Saskatchewan today regarding big game problems that they're finding.

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 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.

The people that have signed these petitions today, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Kincaid and Hazenmore, in my own constituency. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I present petitions signed by citizens mostly in the city of Regina. If I may 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 problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges, including car thefts, 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.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to present the following petitions on behalf of the people 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 years ahead.

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

From the Swift Current area of our province, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present these this morning.

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

I rise to present the following petition and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray 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.

These come from Saskatoon, Elstow, Hague, Prince Albert. Treaty Indians have signed this, all sorts of thoughtful people, and I so present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I as well have petitions to present to this Assembly. I'd like to read the prayer.

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, Mr. Speaker, these petitions I have are signed by individuals from across this province including areas like Saskatoon, Nipawin, Meadow Lake, Warman, and even one signature here from Delta, B.C. (British Columbia), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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.

These petitions come from the Saskatoon area, Mr. Speaker, from down on the U.S. (United States) border at Minton, and across the province, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

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 reduce the PST by two points in the 1997 provincial budget;

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

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to establish a task force to aid the fight against youth crime.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Tuesday next move the first reading of a Bill, the employers and babysitters restriction Act. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 12 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: how many applications from Saskatchewan female farmers for the farm fuel rebate has the government received since female farmers were ruled eligible for the rebate in 1996?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly here today a constituent of mine seated in the east gallery — Emily Olm of Churchbridge. And I would ask that the members join with me and welcome her today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly a group of 50 grade 8 students seated in the west gallery. They're from the St. Francis School and we're going to have a little get-together in room 218 after we get completed here.

And I notice also that we're going to have drinks — I assume soft drinks — and I'm going to be paying for those soft drinks. But the House Leader has graciously offered to help pay for the

drinks.

But seriously, I hope the students who are here today to take part in observing of question period enjoy their stay. And I'm really looking forward to meeting you after we complete question period. So good luck. God bless you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce a very special guest to the legislature today. It is Anika Marcotte in your gallery. Anika is a student at Luther interested in the functioning of government; on her own initiative asked to come and join me today and observe what happens in the legislature and around the offices and how government functions.

She is a student of some accomplishment in music. She is going to, later on today, to be joining a provincial competition, a French debating competition in Saskatoon. And I'm absolutely delighted to introduce her to the House and to recognize one of our wonderful young people who are willing to change the world. Anika Marcotte.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to the other members of the Assembly, seated in your gallery, some friends of mine. We have with us, travelling down from Meadow Lake today, my constituency assistant, Susan Karpenko.

And with her — if they'd just stand as I introduce them — with her also she brought her entire family, with the exception of her husband, I think: Randi and Jesse and Hedi and Jenifer, and also with her is her mother, Violet Kozloski.

Susan has done a wonderful job of raising her four children and she does probably equally as good a job looking after me, so welcome them. Welcome all of them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Business Technology Achievements in Saskatoon

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, it is one thing to wish for something; reality is quite a different matter. I'm sure that every city in North America has dreams of being a high-tech centre. My city of Saskatoon, however, has long since skipped from the dream to actuality.

Here are a few examples to add to the already long, long list of Saskatoon accomplishments. Massload Technologies recently signed a marketing contract with a Korean manufacturing company. That's 12 more solid jobs for Saskatoon.

Advanced Mining and Tunnelling Systems International, a brand-new Saskatoon company, has acquired patents for new mining equipment.

SCI-TEC Instruments has developed a sophisticated

environmental monitoring system. A major American oil company has purchased this system from them.

Innovation Place, the high-tech showcase of Canada, has four new tenants who will join the rest in pushing the edges of ag biotech research and development.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes the most effective argument is simply a long list of accomplishments. Once again I would like to congratulate all those people, starting with Allan Blakeney, who had the foresight to set the stage for technological advancement in Saskatoon through the establishment of Innovation Place. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Support for Saskatchewan Roughriders

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the time clock is running out for the Saskatchewan Green and White. This weekend the team is taking to the television airwaves in a last-ditch effort to sell 200,000 tickets to stay in the game. The team is trying to keep an 87-year tradition alive in the province. I don't want to think what it would be like if the team were not around.

Yes we've all been frustrated with the Riders, we've all played armchair quarterback and have criticized the team. But at the same time we must remember the high points, the times we've revelled in making it to the play-offs and the ultimate goal, the Grey Cup.

The Riders have said they will close up shop if they can't meet their ticket deadline. It will be a sad day in the province if this happens. It is third and long for Saskatchewan, so I am urging all residents of this province to throw their support behind the team that has given us so much economic benefits over the years, and pure joy. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agri-Food Innovation Fund and University of Saskatchewan Agreement

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news from Saskatoon for all of Saskatchewan, and this time it's from the University of Saskatchewan, which has recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the ag food innovation fund which will have long-term benefits, not only for the university, but for Saskatchewan farmers as well. This agreement provides money for research projects totalling more than \$10 million in biotechnology, food processing, specialized crops, specialized livestock, and sustainable agriculture.

It is important and significant that these projects go to the University of Saskatchewan — significant because the announcement reinforces the reputation of the university's research capacities; important because the commitment of funds will enable the university to sustain current research projects and undertake new ones.

Finally, I want to say that the Agri-Food Innovation Fund is an

excellent example of federal and provincial cooperation, an example that could be profitably imitated in some other areas as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Benefit for Tyrone Parislau

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to . . . once again I'm pleased to illustrate how rural communities come together to help one another in a time of need.

A shining example of this is happening in my constituency in the community of Grayson this evening. The Grayson Knights of Columbus are hosting a dinner theatre performance tonight to a sold-out audience of 160 people. And the show is being performed by Grayson's own Polka Dot Players.

The Knights have organized this fund-raising event to help Tyrone Parislau, a young man in his early 20's who will be undergoing treatment in British Columbia for Hodgkin's disease.

The money raised will be added to the special fund that has been established to help Tyrone cover his medical and personal expenses when he is in Vancouver this spring for treatments.

Our thoughts and our prayers go with this young man. And I would like to also congratulate all the organizations and all people who have joined together to support Tyrone. Their dedication and commitment in helping individuals and their community as a whole is something they should take great pride in. They are the heart of their community.

I would like everyone to join me in thanking these organizations throughout the province for their continued hard work and dedication to the people of our small communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Agricultural Diversification Opportunities

Mr. Whitmore: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the close of Agriculture and Food Week in Saskatchewan, I'd like to commend two areas of diversification that offer tremendous opportunities for our producers — specialized livestock and herb and spice production. Both are becoming popular topics within the farming community.

The popularity of these two areas demonstrates Saskatchewan producers are examining new opportunities to diversify with ag and food industry. People are prepared to travel hundreds of miles across the province to attend information meetings regarding the production of these specialized areas.

There are already a large number of producers involved in herb and spice production, Mr. Speaker. Adding to that production is the establishment of 22 herb and spice marketing agencies that make Saskatchewan a leader in the industry.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, companies such as Bioriginal Food

& Science Corp. of Saskatoon has provided some food processing in these new crops. In addition, Mr. Speaker, elk, bison, white-tail deer production is gaining similar interest among producers. Meetings this year alone have attracted over 500 interested producers.

Mr. Speaker, the ag and food industry of this province is changing and it is adapting to new challenges, embracing new opportunities. This challenge will certainly benefit our entire province and maintain our leadership worldwide within agriculture and food in the industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Winning Strategy for Saskatchewan Roughriders

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have all heard about the plight that the Roughriders are in and we all sympathize and we all support the Riders. But I believe that I have come up with a possible solution to the Roughriders' problems.

As you recollect, in 1966 the Roughriders won the Grey Cup under a Liberal regime in this province. In 1989 the Roughriders won the Grey Cup under a Tory regime in this province. If the government members, Mr. Speaker, really wish to help the Roughriders, they will all resign — allow the Roughriders to win the Grey Cup in 1997.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Enhanced Business Training for Low Income Women

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, our province has long been known as the social laboratory of Canada, the reputation of which members on this side are quite proud. And I think I can safely say that Prince Albert has been at the heart of social innovation. One major example is the West Flat's project which I have spoken about in this House.

Today I want to commend another small but significant project taking place in Prince Albert. The project is called, enhanced business training for low income women. This project will offer 10 women a business training curriculum to prepare them to develop and operate a micro-business. The trainees will have access to start-up funds through an innovative micro-loan circle system funded by the Prince Albert Credit Union. The training will also involve parenting, life management, upgrading, and computer skills. At the end of the project the women will have developed new, marketable skills that will support them in the job market, aiming at self-employment.

And, Mr. Speaker, this project is the kind of effort we are seeing more and more — a project of eight partners, only one of which is a government agency. This is a true example of a community partnership. Leading the project is the Prince Albert YWCA. The other partners are the local REDA (regional economic development authority), Prince Albert Credit Union, The Prince Albert Chamber of Commerce, the Community Service Centre, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied

Science and Technology), the multicultural society, and the New Careers Corporation. Mr. Speaker, I congratulate them and wish the students well in their training.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

80th Anniversary of Abdication of Last Russian Czar

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week marks the anniversary of the March revolution when oppressed Russians rose up to throw off the shackles of Romanov rule. Tomorrow marks the 80th anniversary of the abdication of the last Russian czar, thus ending three centuries of Romanov misrule.

Mr. Speaker, the tyranny and cruelty of the Romanovs is legendary. The most famous member of the dynasty was Ivan the Terrible. Mr. Speaker, I realize there are still some Romanov supporters who mourn this anniversary. But I say today is a day to be celebrated by freedom-loving peoples everywhere. In the words of the anthem of the civil rights movement, "We shall overcome."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Proposed Regina School Closures

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, tonight parents, students, and staff of the Regina Public School Board will be meeting to find out if their school will remain open next year. It's a sad state of affairs when one of the largest school divisions in Saskatchewan is forced to contemplate the closure of nine schools.

As a result of chronic underfunding by this government, the Regina public school system has cut 87.5 teaching positions since 1991 and has been forced to raise the mill rate by 9.52 mills. This shows how cuts are directly affecting the classroom and the people of Regina.

Will the Premier stand in this House and accept responsibility for the underfunding of education in Regina and across Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the member in a very similar manner to the answer that was given by the Minister of Education yesterday. I just want to point out to the member opposite and to the people in the gallery, people watching, that this is done for political reasons.

The member had the answer yesterday. He knows full well the response — that schools have closed in Saskatchewan since some of us were much younger back in the 1950s. I remember going to school when my rural school was closed that used to be 1 mile from our home at the farm in the RM (rural municipality) of Bone Creek that the member from Shaunavon or the individual representing Shaunavon will know.

This is nothing new. It's been going on for 50 years as the

economy of Saskatchewan reconfigures and people move to urban centres.

The member opposite will also know, because he has been a director of an education system that has closed schools. He knows that. Chairman of the board. Closed schools, so he knows full well.

Now the politics; go ahead, ask your questions, but we should all know this has to do with politics and nothing to do with education.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And to the Deputy Premier, I was not a director of education, even though someday I'd aspire to be that. I was a board member.

And as I listened to the answer of the minister yesterday, I believe that the Deputy Premier has not listened. And indeed at a time when schools were closed across this province . . . they've been going on for awhile. But now we're at the point where school closures are occurring because of underfunding, not because of enrolment. Schools of 200 students are closing. The minister knows full well that government's underfunding of education is resulting in school closures in this city.

The shutting of the doors on some Regina schools will result in pressure on the separate school system in Regina. This will happen in cases where parents will simply enrol their children in the nearest separate school.

Will the Deputy Premier acknowledge that this government's funding decisions are driving a rift between Saskatchewan school divisions?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what I find distasteful about the member's question is this attempt, which was the previous administration, the Devine government's attempt, to put barriers between different groups of people. And I remember welfare recipients versus non-welfare recipients, and non-natives against natives, and urban against rural.

I just caution the Liberal Party that that, even in political terms, is not very successful, to try to put a wedge between Catholic and public school system. Because what is happening in Saskatchewan is many areas are working together in partnership to sort this out. And you know that. And so for you to come here and try to put that division between the different school boards is not only unfortunate, but I would ask the member to get out of that area and come back to the main point.

And he will know that schools have closed when revenues have been increasing and when revenues have been stable. So that's not the reason. It's the change in demographics. You know it full well. You've made the speeches in your past to your own school board. So come onside, look up your old speeches, and give them back to the House and be honest about this.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I will direct the next question to the Minister of Finance. The truth of the matter is that the entire education system in Saskatchewan is crumbling because this government is failing to provide the leadership and vision needed to develop and maintain quality education for Saskatchewan children.

Because the Minister of Finance seems fixated on how many more sleeps she can get in before the budget is presented, I am praying that sometime during her deep sleep she will realize that an overall vision is needed to provide for a long-term future for Saskatchewan education.

Mr. Speaker, we'd like the Finance minister to stay awake long enough to let everyone know exactly when she will finally provide leadership and a plan for improving the quality of education in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to enter this debate. Because what the members opposite are not telling the people of Saskatchewan is there hasn't been any cut to K to 12 funding for this year. So you're saying these schools are closing because a cut in funding is occurring that is not occurring.

I mean I know that you have a job to do here to try to criticize the government. You've taken on that job. But at least be upfront with people and tell them the facts. In fact K to 12 is getting more funding, not less funding. So please don't say schools are closing because of lack of funding — there is increased funding.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education and Industry

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, industries in Englefeld and Anaheim are willing to do for education what this government is not — they're willing to put their money where their mouth is.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Minister of Economic Development recently received letters from Schulte Industries and Doecker Industries giving notice of their offer to supply schools in their area with equipment to make distance education possible — an offer aimed at helping to save the local schools, because government policy certainly won't.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Englefeld and Anaheim have requested an answer to a very simple question, and I'm asking you this question from them: what is the minister doing to recognize the fact that education and industry success go hand in hand?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Well the member will obviously know that education and training is a big part of economic development, and JobStart and the other programs that we have in place that are well recognized by the industry, particularly the industries in your area that affect machinery manufacturing and processing — that those programs have been very, very

effective. And part of the reason that last month, year over year, month over month, the job numbers in Saskatchewan were up by 7,000 have a great deal to do with the training programs that the Minister of Education has put in place.

As it would relate to the specific issue the member has raised, I have talked and met with members of the community and the industry to deal and talk about this issue. And the Minister of Education is involved and you know that there have been many arrangements and work is being done and consultation taking place.

And I'm sure that the member will understand that her involvement should be in a positive way as opposed to an adversarial, political comment that tries to get her a better position as opposed to the students in her area.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have heard this government state on many occasions that jobs are the number one priority. They want to create jobs in industry, but on the other hand they continue to close rural schools and eliminate rural services. This can only lead to young families refusing to move into the area, and it makes it increasingly difficult to find employees and justify remaining in rural Saskatchewan. Is job creation only an urban issue?

Mr. Speaker, the Premier was questioned during a November 29 CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) phone-in program about the present funding formula, which is based on student ratios and other factors. He responded by indicating that his government, and I quote: "may very well need to change the formula in terms of providing highly skilled kids, not only in the Englefeld area but for other areas in this province."

What commitment is the Premier willing to make today to back up this statement?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the government's commitment to the best quality public education system that we can possibly finance and afford in the province of Saskatchewan is clearly stated and without parallel.

The necessity of education, more than just for the creation of jobs, but education in the sense of its liberating quality, the ability to make men and women think and to develop their fullest potential, is what this government is all about.

The member opposite talks about what is the depth of our commitment. It is that. And we are making the transitional changes to a variety of educational objectives, ranging all the way from JobStart and Future Skills to foundation formulas, examinations, and the like.

And this question comes from the very same member who, on another day, will get up and say that there are no jobs being created by this government. Today she says there are so many jobs being created by this government that we don't have

enough students to fill the jobs. Someday the Liberals have got to get their act and their position straight and clear. Face the fact that this government's commitment to education in the face of federal cut-backs has been unparalleled and that our revamping of the education system to make it the best in . . .

The Speaker: — Next question, next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Regina Murder Case

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a further question to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, it appears again, as we saw yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that we have another mishandled case in the province of Saskatchewan by his department, by the prosecutor's office.

We now have the lawyers for the three men who were released yesterday, and wrongly accused, suggesting that they may be considering suing for the 130 days their clients were incarcerated.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we've heard where the minister would stand up and say, well it's before the courts; therefore I can't give an answer. But I would like to suggest that the compensation lawsuit is not before the courts yet, so I'm hopeful we can get an answer.

Mr. Minister, do you believe these men deserve compensation for the 130 days they spent in jail accused of this brutal murder? How much will the taxpayers of Saskatchewan have to shell out for the Department of Justice's mishandling of this case?

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This case is presently before the court and as such, it is inappropriate for me to comment on the details of that case. However, I am able to speak generally about the criminal justice process.

As you know, the police are responsible for investigating and gathering evidence concerning a crime. In the course of gathering this evidence, they exercise their discretion in determining whether charges should or should not be laid against any particular individual. This is often done in consultation with the Crown prosecutor's office.

When the Crown prosecutor receives the information from the police, it is the Crown prosecutor's responsibility to assess this information and exercise discretion about whether those charges should proceed. Even after charges have been laid, the investigation process often continues and new information may come to light.

If the Crown prosecutor determines that the evidence is insufficient or it is not in the best interest of justice to sustain or to continue with the charges as laid, it's within their discretion to amend the charges or enter a stay. At any point in the process, the Crown prosecutor may determine that the charges

against the accused cannot proceed. This is because . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister is correct. However, the reasons and the ability to lay charges lay at the prosecutor's feet and it's imperative that the prosecutor's office in this province, or in any jurisdiction, make sure that beyond a shadow of a doubt they have the correct evidence before that final decision to lay charges is made. Because, Mr. Speaker, if there isn't a check, balance, innocent people will continually be forced to defend their innocence. And I disagree with that.

But, Mr. Speaker, as well, we're aware of the fact that the minister had implemented a review of his office by Mr. Martin from Calgary, and I understand that Mr. Martin has sent his report to the minister. I'm asking the minister today if he will release his report, give us an idea of what Mr. Martin has said about the office. And, Mr. Minister, will you be implementing these recommendations immediately after the report is released?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I have said on a number of occasions, the report will be released in approximately 10 or 12 days. And at that time, the member will have a chance to review the report along with all parts of the public. We will be looking at all the recommendations that are made very carefully and we will be implementing the ones that we think are totally appropriate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Sales Tax

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Finance. Madam Minister, you should really read your mail a little more thoroughly and carefully. Read all the pages, read both sides of every page, or have someone read it to you. You keep missing the part that says, cut the PST (provincial sales tax).

Madam Minister, business leaders are now accusing you of deliberately ignoring their call to cut the PST. The CFIB (Canadian Federation of Independent Business) says so. The Regina chamber says so. When are you going to start listening? When are you going to get the whole message from business and cut the PST?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, thank you very much for that question. What I have been talking about is the record of this government. I have said again and again and again I'm not making any comments about the budget. And I'm not hypothesizing about what different groups have said and will say about the budget. I'm talking about the record of this government. But what is so amazing is these members opposite here telling us how to manage the finances of the province and how to cut taxes.

When they were government what they did was raise just about

every tax that exists. They put in place the flat tax. They tried to harmonize. They increased the debt of the province at the same time so that we're here to clean up their mess.

So I say to the member opposite, we are listening. You will see the results of the budget when the budget comes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Environmental Handling Charges

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Minister of Finance, who is all talk, and the only action she takes is to raise every tax and fee in this province and collect over a billion dollars a year more than previously was done in taxation.

Yesterday the Minister for Environment admitted that the 8-cent recycling fee collected on every juice box sold in Saskatchewan actually goes into the general revenue.

An Hon. Member: — Did you say juice box?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Juice box. Because they don't actually have a recycling program. Madam Minister, that's extremely deceptive. The people of Saskatchewan are being led to believe that they're paying for recycling when it's really just another NDP (New Democratic Party) tax. And worst of all, Madam Minister, it's a tax on groceries, a tax that hits the poorest people in this province — the people, the families with young children.

Madam Minister, will you admit your so-called recycling fee is nothing more than a tax?

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for that question. First of all, a couple of facts to respond to what the member is saying. The tax covers not just the costs of recycling, it also covers the costs of handling. And we've also been talking to the groups involved, the Tetra-Pak people, saying that the money will be dedicated to recycling when they put recycling in place.

But again, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what these members have on the record here. They go on about, they would reduce taxes, they would do this or that. And they've also told the people of Saskatchewan what they would be prepared to do on the other side of the ledger. Shocked — I was shocked the other day. These people are going back to the future. They're prepared once again for a holus-bolus, mindless sale of Crown corporations — a fire sale of Crown corporations, which their party did in the '80s, which helped get us into this mess.

This government will go toward the future, not like those people — back to the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The handling of the Tetra-Paks are done by the stores and the consumers and the government doesn't have a hand in it other than collecting taxes on it.

Madam Minister, you can call this whatever kind of a tax you want, but a fee that goes into general revenue is a tax, especially when you don't even have a recycling program in place to deal with it.

We put the recycling program in place for cans and bottles, and you have done nothing.

Madam Minister, we all know that our tax dollars go to a lot of questionable government programs, but this is the first time I've heard of an imaginary government program.

The minister likes to talk about targeted tax cuts. Will you provide a targeted tax cut and remove the 8-cent tax on juice containers at least until Saskatchewan has a Tetra-Pak recycling program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I must confess I didn't hear the whole question. But let me say this to the member opposite. As the Minister of Environment has said on that issue, we are talking with the Tetra-Pak people about putting in place the appropriate recycling program.

But you know, the members opposite, when they say money goes into the General Revenue Fund, it's as if it goes poof! — off somewhere else. Money that goes into the General Revenue Fund goes to health, education, roads.

Now I'm sure I understand why the Tory Party . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I understand why the Tory Party isn't concerned about the money that's going into health, education, roads, because I notice in the paper as well, what they've said is that they support a 5 per cent cut to government funding, a 5 per cent cut — 1,000 teachers' jobs lost; a 5 per cent cut to health — the end of the home care program.

Mr. Speaker, what we have across here are Mike Harris Tories. And voters of Saskatchewan, beware.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Dialysis Treatment in East-Central Saskatchewan

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring to the attention of this House an issue that is of great concern to many people who live in Yorkton, and in fact the entire east-central region of the province.

Gordon Olm, a retired farmer from Churchbridge, is one of many people from this region who requires dialysis treatment for a kidney problem. Mr. Speaker, the Yorkton Regional Health Centre has a dialysis machine. Unfortunately, the facility does not have the funding for a specially trained nurse or medical supplies which are necessary to run this unit. As a result, Mr. Olm and his wife are forced to travel to Regina twice each week, 480-kilometre trip, for treatment. In spite of the fact

they live on a fixed income, they have rented an apartment in this city to cut costs.

Will the minister explain how he, as the Minister of Health, can justify this situation, and will he admit that this is another symptom of his government's failure to properly fund our health care system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, last year a new renal dialysis unit was opened at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. I want to inform the member that dialysis is available in four locations in the province of Saskatchewan — Regina, Saskatoon, Lloydminster, and Prince Albert, I believe.

And dialysis requires, Mr. Speaker, a tremendous amount of courage on the part of people who need renal dialysis. And they live with a very difficult situation, Mr. Speaker. But the reality is, when you give dialysis to people, you also have to provide them with a range of professionals, a range of equipment, necessary for dialysis to take place.

And if the member . . . And we will look, Mr. Speaker, at whether there should be more locations for kidney dialysis. But if the member is suggesting that there can be dialysis clinics in every centre of Saskatchewan where somebody needs it, the member is misleading the public, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I have a list of names from communities that are out near our constituency: from Moosomin, Yorkton, Canora, Churchbridge, Wapella, Kamsack, Punnichy, Whitewood, Grayson, Goodeve, Leross, Kamsack, Bangor, Foam Lake — the list goes on, Mr. Minister. They're not very happy with that answer.

Mr. Speaker, I am told that qualified nurses who provide dialysis treatments on Mr. Olm find the job of conducting this procedure very difficult. Yet he has been told by his local district board that perhaps a solution might be to have a member of his family take a course so he can be treated with a portable dialysis unit at home.

Mr. Minister, if qualified nurses say they have problems carrying out a dialysis procedure on Mr. Olm, is it reasonable to suggest that a member of his family can do the same?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, there are some people for whom home dialysis is an appropriate course of treatment and they are receiving home dialysis. And that is what they want because they do not then have to go to another centre to get dialysis, which is what the member says he wants.

If the member is suggesting that people in this province should be denied home dialysis, I have to say I disagree with the member. If people can have dialysis at home, they should have dialysis at home, Mr. Speaker. And if they need the regimen that is required to give dialysis properly in a renal dialysis

centre, Mr. Speaker, they should have that too.

But if the member is going to mislead people by saying that that can be done in every centre where somebody who needs dialysis lives, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite, is quite wrong.

And while the member is saying that, Mr. Speaker, the member should explain why the leader of the member's party says that we should take hundreds of millions of dollars out of our provincial health care budget, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 11 — The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 11, The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the 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. 12 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 12, The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read for the very 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. 13 — The Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I move Bill No. 13, The Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read at the 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. 14 — The Water Corporation Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 14, The Water Corporation Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the 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. 15 — The Department of Health Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 15, The Department of Health Amendment Act, 1997 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm asking leave of the House, which I think has been arranged by the House leaders, to introduce a special resolution.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Saskatchewan Roughriders

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief in some preliminary remarks, at the end of which I will move, by leave of the Assembly and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, a motion pertaining to the Saskatchewan Roughriders.

As we all know, March 15 is, I guess, tomorrow where the Roughriders and their efforts to obtain 200,000 tickets is going to be — how shall I describe it? — at least, judged. I want to use the words carefully in the context.

And what we want to say very briefly in introducing this motion is that 87 years of tradition, the great players who have given the fans and the people of Saskatchewan so much entertainment — people like Frank Tripucka, Bobby Marlow, George Reed, Hugh Lancaster, Ron Lancaster, Hughie Campbell, George Reed, Ron Atchison from the Saskatoon Hilltops, these are the great football players. Bill Clarke, yes. You can name . . . you just go on for ever.

Eighty seven years of community involvement, community pride, joy, distinguishing Saskatchewan in a way to the rest of Canada — this is really is what the Roughriders are all about. I can't imagine actually the CFL (Canadian Football League) without the Saskatchewan Roughriders. And I'm very confident that the people of Saskatchewan will come forward with their support at the community level for the Roughriders.

I would just simply like to close by saying with those few remarks, that I hope I express the sentiments of all the members of the House by moving, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, by leave of the Assembly, the following motion:

That this Assembly endorse and encourage the efforts of the Saskatchewan Roughriders Football Club as it continues with its ticket sales drive; and that this Assembly congratulate the team organizers, the volunteers, the players, for the work that they have done, and extend best wishes for the upcoming weekend's telethon; and that this Assembly urge all people in Saskatchewan to support the Roughriders because of the team's long-standing tradition in our province, and the jobs and economic revenues it generates throughout Saskatchewan.

By leave of the Assembly, I so move, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, member from Canora.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to second that motion. As I indicated in a member's statement this morning, we as the official opposition caucus recognize the importance of the Saskatchewan Roughriders to not only the city of Regina, as indicated yesterday by comments made by Mayor Archer, but throughout all of Saskatchewan.

The economic spin-off for other parts of Saskatchewan, of course, is not as large as here in Regina or on highways that lead to Regina on game day. All you have to do is stop in communities like Fort Qu'Appelle and Chamberlain and Davidson and you'll see the economic spin-offs for businesses in those communities.

There has been a pride in Saskatchewan, a pride in this football team, that it is our football team. It is not a government team. It is not a Regina team. It is the team of Saskatchewan. And the Premier has indicated so many names of so many individuals — I recall just two nights ago when we listened to Bob Poley as a Master of Ceremonies of the function that we attended. And there are so many other people that have done a tremendous amount to bring about good quality football to Saskatchewan.

I believe that the Canadian Football League as well is going through a very tough time. And it indeed has to look at how it has functioned to ensure that the quality of football is there, yes, but indeed that we are working within our means as a football league.

If the league succeeds, there's no question, as indicated by Mr. Baker, the important role that Saskatchewan plays. I believe Mr. Lancaster this morning is quoted as saying that the CFL will not exist if the Saskatchewan Roughriders don't exist. And that is a very good compliment for our football team, and indeed the province of Saskatchewan that has the greatest fans in all of Canada.

So I again take great pride in seconding the motion and encouraging all people in Saskatchewan to get behind the drive as individuals. Get that ticket sales up over the 200,000 mark. It's not unheard of. Yesterday I asked an official of the Roughriders the number of people that attended last year — and it wasn't a great year for attendance — that number was 227,000 people. And all they're asking for right now, upfront, is a sale of 200,000.

I know we can do it. I know the people of Saskatchewan will do it. And I urge all residents to support that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many qualities that separate Saskatchewan people from other provinces. We take great pride in our small communities and our rural way of life, our agricultural industry, our western values. But, Mr. Speaker, adding to that list is our never-ending support of our Saskatchewan Roughriders.

Fans, in general, are fickle. They support their team when they

are on a winning streak or playing the championship game. But when their team is having a bit of a rough time, fan numbers and their support dwindle.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are an anomaly in this regard. It doesn't matter if the Riders are winning or losing, it doesn't matter if it's 40 below or 25 above, Saskatchewan people are at Taylor Field cheering for their favourite team. That's dedication.

It's easy to be a fan, Mr. Speaker, in southern California, where the weather is always nice and you get a tan while you're at the park. But it's a different story when you have to brave the elements in Saskatchewan — be it thunderstorms in July or blizzards in October.

(1100)

I guess it separates the wimpy fans from the hard-core fans, Mr. Speaker, and that's what we are in Saskatchewan — hard-core, dedicated fans. Of course we get a little bit more excited if we're winning, Mr. Speaker, but the bottom line is Saskatchewan people love their football. We love football and we love the Riders.

Mr. Speaker, I would estimate that for every quarterback on the field there are thousands in the stands, in their tractors, or in their easy chairs. And it's pretty easy to sit on top with a bird's-eye view and coach the Riders all the way to a Grey Cup win, but it's a lot harder to be out in the field giving 110 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, it would really be a shame if after so many years of wonderful tradition, the Riders were no longer packing the stands in Taylor Field. For 87 years Saskatchewan families have supported our Riders through the good times and the bad.

And, Mr. Speaker, I remember going to 4-H events in the back of my neighbour's car, Percy Cowan, and we would listen to the Rider games either going or coming from those events. And while we all hated it when Ron Lancaster waited until the last minute to win the game, we always found the games exciting. On a personal note, Mr. Speaker, in our caucus, my colleague from Cypress Hills, his wife taught Roger Aldag. Now we all know how large Roger Aldag is, and the member from Cypress Hills wife, Jeanette, is very small. There was always a great deal of respect there and there still is, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have a great tradition in Saskatchewan with the Roughriders, and that is a tradition that needs to be kept and it needs to be renewed. So right now we need to shore up that support so that future generations can enjoy the Roughriders for another 87 years, and this morning my colleagues and I did our part and purchased our Roughrider tickets.

But perhaps there is another thing that needs to be done, Mr. Speaker. The question of David Archer comes up. If we had David Archer, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that we would easily sell out that 200,000 tickets.

Now in the past, Mr. Speaker, and some of the names that the Premier has mentioned, I know had jobs off the field in Regina.

And, Mr. Speaker, we believe this would perhaps be an opportunity for one of our corporations to provide some assistance to the Saskatchewan Roughriders. And we have a particular position in mind that would certainly help with David Archer, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the position that Jack Messer holds today would be a suitable position for someone who we believe can resurrect and revive the fortunes of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, Mr. Speaker. And we would like to place that as a recommendation to the government for their consideration.

Mr. Speaker, we won the Grey Cup in '86, we won the Grey Cup in '89, and if we support the Roughriders today, if the people of Saskatchewan support the Roughriders today, we will have an opportunity in '97 and beyond to again win the Grey Cup.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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.

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to continue my reply to the throne speech. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to tell about my constituency and what an honour it is to be elected by the constituents of Weyburn-Big Muddy to represent their views and their concerns to the Government of Saskatchewan.

I spoke of what I heard from the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy through consultation, that jobs . . . and through that consultation I found that their concerns were very similar to the concerns that are being addressed by our throne speech.

Through consultation, I heard that jobs and the economy are a priority; that health, education, and social programs must be protected; that highways and transportation issues were important, especially as they pertain to the agriculture community; that my constituents are supportive of the Crown corporations; that the communities of Gladmar, Minton, Ceylon, Ogema, and Bengough hope to have cellular service expanded to include their areas.

My constituents told me that they wanted to have continued balanced budgets, with no new taxes. They wanted government to be effective, efficient, and accountable. And they wanted a government that consulted and listened to their concerns. Mr. Speaker, I believe the throne speech addresses the priorities of my constituents. Our throne speech is about hope and about optimism.

Today through cooperation, community, and shared efforts, Saskatchewan is back on its feet. Five years of hard work and sacrifice by the people of Saskatchewan has paid off. We are building a stronger Saskatchewan together by investing in our province, our people, and our future.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I spoke of the government's top priority — jobs. And how our economic strategy has been working in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan economy is doing well. We have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. And more people are moving to Saskatchewan than are moving away.

And as I said yesterday, the feeling of economic optimism is being felt throughout Saskatchewan and throughout Weyburn and area, with a booming gas and oil industry, with recent announcements in Weyburn of business expansions, of the Wheat Pool, the Weyburn Inland Terminal, and the Co-op, with real estate sales increasing.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, our top priority is jobs and our throne speech addresses this important priority. It addresses it through where it's encouraging the expansion of trade, promoting expansion and diversification of our rural economy, renewing Saskatchewan's Crown corporations, promoting tourism and hospitality industry, and by participating in an extended national infrastructure plan.

Yes we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. But that's not enough. We want full employment for our province. Yes we are investing in people. Jobs is a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke yesterday of our second priority — education and training, as it serves as a bridge to employment. I spoke of the extensive K to 12 consultation that took place and how our government listened to the people of Saskatchewan. I spoke of visiting schools throughout my constituency and how I was so impressed with the quality of programs and the enthusiasm of the teachers and the students. We have much to be proud of in our youth and in our education system.

Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased when we have the throne speech that we always have a youth choir here participating. During the Commonwealth Day that we honoured we had youth participating. It is so great to have that quality of youth right here in our legislature, Mr. Speaker, who are a very valuable resource for our province, for today and for tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, education though, still must continue to evolve to meet the challenge of tomorrow and the 21st century. We must all become lifelong learners. Education does not end with grade 12. We all know that we must have a post-secondary system which is responsive to the challenges we face in an ever-changing world. And I believe the regional colleges, SIAST, and the universities have all played a very major role in the training and education of the people of Saskatchewan.

I'm very impressed with the number of programs that the Southeast Regional College delivers to the south-east part of Saskatchewan. This regional college must be commended for how responsive they are to the needs of the communities and the people in our area.

Mr. Speaker, learning is a lifelong experience if we are to meet the challenges of tomorrow. So I am pleased that the throne speech of the second session of the twenty-third legislature has set this as a priority: to provide the best public education and training at every level; to make sure our teachers are the best they can be; to make sure our people are the best educated that they can be; and to make sure that our province and our workers are the most motivated that they can be; and to make sure that we build on the successes like JobStart and Future Skills, and to implement a made-in-Saskatchewan training strategy. To make sure, in short, that lifelong learning is a reality for the whole workforce. Now this is investing in people.

Mr. Speaker, we do this in spite of the Liberals and the Tories. What has been their contribution? Well the outstanding Liberal contribution to education is a \$7 billion cutback to education and health to all the provinces. Seven billion dollars less from Ottawa to the provinces.

And the outstanding Tory contribution, as we know in Saskatchewan, is to saddle us with the largest public debt per capita of any province in the country — \$850 million a year in interest costs on the debt. Eight hundred and fifty million dollars. That interest cost charge is about the size of what we spend yearly on the entire education in Saskatchewan.

So we do this in spite of the obstacles — this waste, this lack of direction by the Liberals and the Conservatives. Mr. Speaker, our government believes in investing in people through education and training.

A third priority, and a most important priority, is reducing child poverty and social program redesigning.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud that our Premier and our government is leading the nation in bringing this issue to a national focus. Our Premier and our government has called on the federal government and legislatures across Canada to take action and to take action now, not in 1998 as the federal government budget suggests. Children in poverty, children who are hungry, cannot be asked to wait until 1998. This is unconscionable.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, jobs are the best way to address child poverty and to enable people to escape welfare. We must train youth and people for the workforce.

And, Mr. Speaker, I am proud that our Premier and our government will work energetically to implement a national child benefit. And if and when we succeed, this will be the first national social program in 30 years — a new child benefit plan designed to give a break to the working poor so that they can feed, clothe, house, educate, and care for their children.

Mr. Speaker, we will also strengthen our action plan for children, enhancing support and prevention services. We've already made great strides with the action plan for children, with increased support for early intervention preschool, for increased support for community schools, for increased support to students in schools with special needs, enhanced measles immunity programs, child care initiatives — and this is to name only a few.

Mr. Speaker, right across this province, Saskatchewan people are hard at work helping their fellow citizens. In Weyburn-Big Muddy there is tremendous caring for children and families.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased that the people who work in the Souris Valley Child Care centre in Weyburn were commended in the throne speech. They were commended for providing innovative and accessible child care for rural and working families during harvest, for night-shift workers, and all year round.

I also want to commend The Family Place for the valuable work they do in Weyburn and area in support of children and families. The child abuse council, the violence intervention program, are two other very important programs offered in Weyburn, and are protecting our children and our families.

Mr. Speaker, child poverty is a priority. We must attack child poverty with all our ability, and it must be now. And it is my hope that the federal government will also make it their priority. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are investing in children, in our families.

(1115)

Mr. Speaker, our fourth priority, a stable, secure health system. We are investing in health care. We are investing in people. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is years ahead of other jurisdictions in health care renewal. And we can now focus on stabilizing and securing our health system, which is solid on its new foundations.

Mr. Speaker, by the changes we have made in health care delivery we are protecting medicare for the people of Saskatchewan for today and for tomorrow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Health care changes have not been easy. It has been difficult and some mistakes have been made. But we have learned from our mistakes and we are securing the best health care system possible for the people of Saskatchewan.

Health care means providing the best institutional care we can when it is needed. But health care is much broader than that. It is home care services, it's immunization programs, it's good nutrition for children and pregnant mothers, it's good water, it's addiction services, it's prevention, and it's education. It's a holistic approach; it's the well-being of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual being of our citizens.

But, Mr. Speaker, last year what did the federal government do? The federal government cut funding for health care and education by \$110 million to Saskatchewan. And what did the province of Saskatchewan do? We back-filled it, we funded it, a hundred per cent. We were the only province in Canada to back-fill that loss.

Yes, investing in health care is a priority. And just last summer because of the strong provincial economy, good fiscal management of the government, we were able to inject an additional \$40 million into health care. Mr. Speaker, this extra funding provided South Central Health District an additional

\$619,000.

This money was well used in our district to deal with salaries, with enhancement to community care, for capital purchases of medical equipment, for enhanced physiotherapy, for capital equipment and program priorities for the rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday in my speech, the Minister of Health and other members of our government visited my constituency in November and we toured the South Central Health District. And you know, we saw health care renewal working.

And, Mr. Speaker, just over the last few days I've had the chance to read over a document the South Central Health District has put out outlining the health services and the initiatives for our area, and I was impressed with what I read. The document sets out some of their accomplishment and sets out goals as well. And I'd like to review just some of things that I found in this document.

Under one section, called health public policy and empowerment of Saskatchewan residents . . . empowerment of Saskatchewan residents — I think that's very, very important to note. What we have is a health care district that's communicating with the residents in that district, as they are right across this province, finding out what the real needs are and how to meet those needs.

There are . . . They have addressed that there's advisory committees in every community of our health care district, and they undergo consultation with each of those advisory committees. They also meet with the local governments. They meet with the Weyburn & Area Council on Child Abuse. They meet with the communities of our areas to provide the best services, the most coordinated services, that there ever has been in health care.

Another heading that was in this document is about improving health and reducing inequities. And under this they have several initiatives that they're trying to address: provision of low income housing, provision of space to The Family Place in Weyburn, pregnant adolescents support program.

They talk about immunization programs, alcohol and drug services, full- and part-time mental health clinics throughout our constituency which were never there before, speech language pathologists — that service for adults, rural counselling programs, wellness clinics expanded, stroke prevention program, acquired brain injury program, alternatives-to-violence training, hired a youth addictions worker, added physiotherapists to rural counselling programs, funding provided to an apartment living program to reduce readmissions of mental health clients. This is health care working in our district throughout our communities.

Another area in which they address . . . the heading in this is on maintaining essential and appropriate services delivered effectively and affordably, and they talk about the health centres and their expanded roles. These health services or health centres are now providing emergency out-patient care, short-term observation, diagnostic services, home care services, long-term care services, respite care, rehabilitation therapies, dietician and

nutrition counselling, and it goes on and on and on. The list goes on.

They've expanded the emergency response training for health care providers. There are currently 100 volunteers in 20 communities. This is health care and wellness working in our area.

They have recruited physicians. We have physicians in Pangman, in Bengough, in Radville, and there are new physicians also in Weyburn. Respite care has been expanded to all of the facilities.

Acute services in Weyburn has also expanded some of their services. They have specialist programs that they'd never had before. They've increased the use of day surgery. They've improved the palliative care services. They've improved planning and coordination systems to enhance follow-up after discharge. Again, this is health care working in our area.

And I could go on and on through this document about supportive care services and some of the programs that are happening in our long-term care facilities; how adult day wellness programs are coordinated with the long-term care facilities; about an acquired brain injury program that's being instituted. This is in partnership with SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance). There is a lot of good news, good services happening in health care in our area.

Home-based services have also expanded. There are so many health improvement initiatives that it . . . I know that the time doesn't allow me to tell you all about them.

But there are good things happening in health care. Our first responder program has a total of 100 responders now available in 20 communities. First responders have responded to 95 calls since their inception. There's funding to support a summer day camp for handicapped children. There is good news.

And one of the most interesting things I felt, is that the youth addictions worker that has just been recently hired was at . . . had George Chuvalo in Weyburn at a recent . . . the community brought him in. He spoke to the school groups. He addressed a number of the concerns that youth are facing. And the youth addictions worker was there. They're meeting with the children. We're seeing the whole community and the community of Weyburn and area all being involved in tackling some of these extreme problems and challenges that are facing our young people.

Like I said, this document is just full of so much good news — good news about health care; good news about wellness. And this is just in South Central, but I know that this is happening right across our province in all of the districts.

Another issue that is happening in South Central — that is taking on public consultation. We have consultation that has never, ever occurred before because there's a capital management plan being discussed in Weyburn on a facilities study. And they're meeting with the community and trying to decide what's the best way to deliver health care services in Weyburn. And I have confidence in the South Central Health

Board, the community of Weyburn, and working with the provincial government, that we will come with the best solution for the future of health care in Weyburn.

Just in the last week or two I've had two experiences of meeting people that they said they want to talk about health care with me. And they had good examples to tell me. One was about an older man that had had a hip that had been bothering and he'd left it and left his hip and hadn't gone in to see the doctor. And finally his family said, you've got to get in and see about this. He went in on a Tuesday to see his doctor, he was referred to a specialist on a Wednesday, he got a call on the Sunday, he had his hip replacement done the next Monday. Within a week he was diagnosed and his hip was replaced.

Another senior was telling me how he'd had some problem with his heart. He saw the doctor in Weyburn, was referred to a specialist, had treatment done, and was back playing pool in the seniors' centre within a week.

These are good news stories. Health care is working.

I just want to commend the work that South Central Health District has done in delivering excellent health care services. I believe health boards, as I've said, right across this province are doing exceptionally good work. And it's with the people.

But what do the Liberals have to say about health care? Their leader says he can find hundreds of millions of dollars in savings from the health budget. Their leader says that Liberals would allow two-tier, for profit, private clinics with the taxpayer picking up the tab. And their leader says community health care is too complicated to discuss through the democratic process. So out go the elected health boards. So maybe instead of 30 elected health boards, he wants to go back to over 400 health boards. Or maybe he doesn't think the public should really know how health care is running. Maybe he wants to go to a system maybe just in which doctors run the system.

It doesn't sound like he's defending health care — at least to most people in Saskatchewan. No, Mr. Speaker, this is not protecting medicare, that is not defending health care. Mr. Speaker, our government, our party, we built medicare, we saved it, and we're taking it forward to the 21st century. We're investing in health, in our people, as a top priority.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Our fifth priority is an integrated transportation strategy. As the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, highways and transportation is a crucial issue. Our transportation system faces unprecedented pressures from the elimination of the Crow benefit, rail line deregulation and abandonment.

So now we're got a real fine mess in transportation thanks to the Liberal government in Ottawa and their withdrawal from transportation. Railroads now have farmers and shippers by the throat. They can charge whatever they want. And in the meantime, our roads are taking a beating as shippers and farmers look for cheaper alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to support the motion last Friday in the emergency debate which demanded that the federal government take steps to address the current backlog by immediately passing legislation to hold the railways and others responsible for the delay — monetarily responsible, including the demurrage charges — so that all the costs incurred by prairie farmers will be reimbursed in full.

Now this motion was sent on to the Prime Minister of Canada and to our federal Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Goodale. And so what has been the response? Well just this week the response is more money for the railroads, higher rates, not money for the farmers as their demurrage charges are increasing.

I have been getting desperate phone calls from farmers in my area that are frustrated because they cannot move their grain to market, especially those farmers who are on branch lines, which are experiencing the hardest hit.

And, Mr. Speaker, they know who's accountable for this. They know who's accountable. It's not the farmers. It's the federal government and it's the railways — not the farmers of Weyburn-Big Muddy and not the farmers of Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are 63,750 reasons why the grain isn't moving. That's the amount of money CP (Canadian Pacific) rail gave to the Liberal Party. Mr. Speaker, the farmers in my constituency cannot afford that political contribution and they should not be penalized by it.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals have turned their back on farmers. They've abandoned farmers; they've abandoned transportation.

But what do the provincial Liberals say? Oh, they say they support their federal cousins. They actually have also said that we should take all \$400 million from the gas tax and put it to highways. Well that's a \$200 million increase in spending.

Now let's just remember what else the provincial Liberals have said. They've also said there should be tax cuts. Now how does this work? Spend more with less revenue. Now I think that adds up to deficit budgeting. And the people of Saskatchewan never want to see a deficit budget in this province again, because we all know, we all know that a deficit is a deferred tax and that you pay it with interest.

(1130)

But isn't it interesting that the provincial Liberals never asked the federal Liberals for their share of the gas tax to go to the potholes in our roads. And isn't it interesting that the member from Wood River, who sets up a hot line, doesn't remind his federal counterparts that if the federal government put in their share, or even matched the share that the provincial government puts in, we wouldn't have any potholes.

And just yesterday we heard from an hon. Tory member complaining also about the roads. And I just want to remind members, especially those Tories, about a little bit of history.

In 1982 Mr. Devine and the Tories made a great pledge during

that campaign. Elect me and we will abolish the gas tax. Well, they were elected. And they did away with it. And when they did away with the gas tax, they gave up \$130 million a year each and every year in public revenue for more than five years as they ran deficits. In total they reduced gas tax revenues by about \$750 million. That was added directly to the provincial debt. Worse still, then they racked up \$1.9 billion in compound interest on that debt, adding further to the provincial debt.

So the Tories put us \$2.6 billion in the hole through their tax gas break. And that 2.6 billion is now costing you and me and the people of Saskatchewan more than \$200 million on ongoing interest costs — \$200 million a year in interest costs by doing away with the gas tax. That is more than our entire budget for highways.

And now the Tories say, well you know the highways need some repair. Well it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you give away the money, you won't be able to keep the highways in proper shape.

So where we are is a federal Liberal government privatizing the ports, privatizing the airports, eliminating the Crow rate, deregulating and privatizing the railways, abandoning the Port of Churchill, abandoning the farmers of Saskatchewan. They're right out of the game. And Canada is the only federal country in the western world without a national, cost-shared highway program.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we have no federal support. We have privatization. We have deregulation. And we have give-away of the gas tax. And we know we must have good highways and an efficient, effective transportation system in our province. Therefore we need to have a comprehensive, integrated transportation strategy. When the Minister of Highways and Transportation met with communities in my constituency, we discussed the importance of working together in a partnership approach, that area transportation planning committees should be set up to define the needs of the region and ensure that all partners are working together — the local governments, the communities, the farmers, the industry — working together to provide the best options we can in transportation.

So, Mr. Speaker, we must introduce a comprehensive, integrated transportation strategy. It must be carefully thought out for the 21st century. And we are doing that, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in transportation for the 21st century.

Mr. Speaker, these are our priorities. First, to create jobs and build the economy. Secondly, to strengthen education and training at every level. Thirdly, to reduce child poverty and redesign social programs; to build a stable, secure, high quality health care system. And to implement a comprehensive transportation strategy. And we must achieve these priorities with a commitment to efficient government, responsible public finance, and orderly reduction of the public debt.

Mr. Speaker, our agenda is one of hope; it's one of optimism. We are investing in people, in jobs, in our communities. We are preparing for the 21st century with compassion and with cooperation and with the communities and the people of this fine province.

As the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy, it is my honour to support the Speech from the Throne. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to stand in this Assembly and to just make a few comments regarding the Speech from the Throne that was presented about a week ago today to this Assembly and drawing us as members back into the Assembly for the spring sitting of the Legislative Assembly in the province of Saskatchewan.

I would also be remiss if I did not extend a few thank you's. And certainly, Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the time that you and I had of visiting communities in my riding — and I know some of the other members have already mentioned it — going to communities like Whitewood and meeting with students in the community of Whitewood, the press; and then in the community of Moosomin.

And as well, as I stand here this morning, Mr. Speaker, there are people in . . . the constituents in the community of Moosomin and surrounding area that are going to have the privilege, if they have cable available, of watching this proceeding. Which, Mr. Speaker, actually brings a bit of a sober thought to us as members as we conduct our business in this Assembly.

But I trust that through the medium of television certainly more people across this province will become more informed about how the process of the Assembly works, how laws come into being, and how each one of us as members conduct ourselves and represent our constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the throne speech the other day, unfortunately . . . I was listening very carefully, and I came to the conclusion that this was maybe one speech that . . . one of the first throne speeches, if you will, that one would have to take serious consideration as to whether or not this was a proper format in the province of Saskatchewan; whether it's a productive process.

Because I didn't really find a lot in this throne speech that would give the residents or the taxpayers of this province something to really be pleased about or something to really be joyous in.

As the member of Weyburn-Big Muddy has just gone through and basically told us why we should be so pleased to have this throne speech presented and what it is offering to the people of Saskatchewan, I think of my communities and I think of my constituency, Mr. Speaker. I think of people in the riding and I'm quite positive that . . . And just listening to and talking to individuals at SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), talking to individuals at the SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) convention that's taking place this week and talking to other residents, I'm quite positive most people, as they were listening, would have thought: is that really what a throne speech is?

It seemed to me that was one of the most hollow delivered

speeches that we've really had. It really didn't have anything. The government made some indications that it was going to give us some real . . . provide some direction through this throne speech. But there really wasn't any.

What direction . . . The minister of Weyburn-Big Muddy is trying to tell us that there was some real direction given in the areas of highways and transportation. And, Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully. Now the Minister of Finance is saying, well wait till the budget speech next week and maybe we'll have something.

I guess, as the SARM delegates indicated the other day, they're certainly waiting. We waited through the throne speech; there was really nothing other than a commitment to a transportation policy. Well, Mr. Speaker, what that tells me, is it just another area of government fluff and government hype just telling us, well we're going to put in place a committee now to design a policy.

And the unfortunate part is when you have another policy or another group of individuals sitting together to design a policy, when will you finally come up with something constructive? Probably not until after the next provincial election. It's a way of basically . . . a way for the government to say to the residents of Saskatchewan, we're going to address this concern; we've heard your concerns; we understand the problems; however, we don't have any answers. We still don't have any answers. We'll put a commission together. Maybe we'll have some answers in the future. And I can see us, just as the Minister of Justice indicated today, it'll be, well it's two weeks down the road or maybe that's another year down the road or whatever. There's no real, no real commitment.

And I can see that happening, that it's going to take us awhile to get to a place of putting together a transportation program and policy, something that, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, the taxpayers of this province can't really wait for.

The road system in this province, and especially with the weather conditions we've had this past winter, will not survive the ongoing destruction and abuse that the road system is taking and survive to even meet the year 1999 when we expect there will probably be another provincial election.

So it's imperative that the government give some serious thought. And if the government wants to design a policy, I don't think they have to wait one or . . . let's say six months or a year or two years. Talk to delegates at SARM. Talk to this rural body of individuals who are out there on an ongoing basis, who run their individual RMs efficiently, effectively, and with balanced budgets; who put money into road programs that enhance the infrastructure across this province.

And I would tell you, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Highways would listen to these individuals, if the Minister of Finance would listen, they would be able to give some solid and sound ideas that really in the long run would not be that expensive but would certainly bring a positive influence and create a positive impact in transportation and highway maintenance and repair in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — So, Mr. Speaker, we do have means; we do have individuals and we do have organizations that certainly can be consulted with.

Now I find it very interesting that the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy would suggest that by removing the gas tax in 1982 it would create such a severe economic fiscal problem for the province of Saskatchewan. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that 5 per cent, I believe, at that time on . . . actually it was more; tax on gas was much higher than that.

But it's interesting that would create such a negative economic impact. It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, there was actually more tax dollars in people's pockets whereby they were able to put it in, and through the economy, that dollar came back into the economy, into the coffers of the province.

But if you want to look at areas that even in 1982 the government elected of that day had to deal with, they had to deal with massive portions of land that were purchased by the former government, money borrowed outside of this province. Money that the premier of the day likes to talk about as having to pay interest to corporations and companies and lending institutions that don't even reside in this province. Well it was money that was invested and money that was borrowed by the then government of Mr. Blakeney, and then of course had to be dealt with by the elected government through the '80s.

It was the Potash Corporation that was set up — a corporation that was losing money on a . . . not only on an annual basis, but massive dollars on a daily basis. It was the Prince Albert pulp and paper company.

So for the sake of viewers who may be watching today, Mr. Speaker, the debt and the deficit we're dealing with today — which the Premier seems to always like to make smaller than it really is compared to what he used to do when he used to sit on this side of the Assembly — is as a result of not just the '80s period, Mr. Speaker. I think we all have to recognize the fact that it started back, possibly started back in the Liberal years of Mr. Pearson nationally. That's when it started.

It started certainly before the Conservatives were elected in '82, and it continues to grow through the NDP governments of the 1990s. And while we all recognize we need to address the problems of debt, Mr. Speaker, at the same time I think, Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to it, we need to realize what areas of responsibility governments should have.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to health care in the province of Saskatchewan, there are a lot of residents across this province, not just in the rural areas like a lot of people like to portray but even in our two large urban centres, who would not agree with the minister . . . or the member from Weyburn Big-Muddy, or even the Health minister about the fact that health care has been saved. Saved from what, one has to ask? What has health care been saved from?

But my colleagues and I had the privilege yesterday of meeting with a group of people from the cooperative movement across this province. And I would suggest to you that there is a

cooperative element working in this province through cooperative health clinics that could offer some very good ideas to this Health minister and to this government as to ways of providing efficient and effective primary health care in the province of Saskatchewan.

And in fact when I was talking to a couple of the individuals, I had suggested to them that they need to take the time to let residents across this province know what they're doing in Saskatoon, in Regina, in . . . I believe it's Prince Albert there's a clinic, and a couple of other clinics. And I just don't remember what the other two were. But just point out what they are doing and the services they are offering to individuals through their cooperative health clinic program.

(1145)

And I believe, Mr. Speaker, if residents of the province of Saskatchewan and other areas really became aware of it, we might find even more innovative ideas and ways of which we can preserve and maintain health services in communities that may have even lost them today without a significant cost increase to the province of Saskatchewan or to the Department of Health. So there are some good ideas out there. We do have people with good ideas.

The minister and the Lieutenant Governor in the Speech from the Throne and the government via the Speech from the Throne told us they're doing more for education. Well I would suggest to you that communities like Windthorst, Glenavon, Francis, and Sedley in the area I represent would have to question what is the government doing to enhance education as they grapple with the fact that their schools may face closure in the near future. And it's a question that has come up in the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, why are they facing this fact? What are some of the problems that they are facing that they have to deal with?

Well let me tell you, Mr. Speaker. One of the problems that they have to deal with is the fact that this government, while they were in opposition, suggested that when there was basically a 60/40 split, in provincial funding of 60 per cent and local funding of 40 per cent back in the late '80s, the current Minister of Education suggested that wasn't enough, we had to put more into education. We had to make more of a commitment to education.

What do we see today, Mr. Speaker? We see that since 1991 that actually the 60/40 split provincial/local has turned and it's now 40 per cent provincial, 60 per cent local. So more of the funding of education has been put on the backs of the local taxpayers. And that's another area of concern to SARM delegates — the fact that they have to put up more. And yet it appears that they have even less of an opportunity and less of an ability to determine how their tax dollars are spent, and to have some input as to whether that educational facility remains in their community.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are many innovative ways that we as Saskatchewan people and residents can use to provide educational services. And I don't believe that closing schools is the real answer at the end of the day. I don't believe

that bus rides that increased from maybe a 20- or 30-minute ride by an extra 45 minutes are the answer. That's once a day. That would be basically an hour and a half a day of an increase. For some students that may even be a minimal amount. Some other students may be facing more.

We have distance education available. We have . . . The Scenic Valley School Division has put forward a proposal and we're looking forward to the study, as they complete this school year, as to what the four-day school week has done in their educational division, and how it's . . . whether or not it's enhanced.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, as I talk to individuals across the Scenic Valley school area, most people are very pleased with what has taken place. Many people are pleased with how the students have responded to that program. And I know there are other educational districts that are looking at Scenic Valley and are consulting with them and are taking a positive approach and view as to possibly implementing that program in their divisions, and thereby looking at the ways in which they can enhance educational opportunities as well as protecting the schools that exist in those communities today.

So, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education, while the government made some indications they were going to do more — they're investing in the quality of education and training — the facts are today we have yet to see that. I guess the proof will be in the pudding as to what really transpires and what really comes about as a result of the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, I also listened with interest when the government talked about ag diversification in the throne speech debate — agricultural diversification. It almost seemed like that's a new word, a new concept, like it hadn't been thought of before; this province hasn't moved in that direction.

I guess maybe we need a history lesson going back to the 1980s when the former premier talked about diversifying this province because he could see, as an envisionsary he could see the demise of the Crow benefit and the transportation system. And the fact that, if we're looking at real jobs in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, take a look at where the real jobs have come in.

The real jobs in this province have come from diversification, specifically in the areas of agriculture, small business, small manufacturing that has grown up in this province. We have agricultural companies in this province today, Mr. Speaker, that are known worldwide, that are trading worldwide as a result of positive policies. And I have to, I have to actually boast a little bit, Mr. Speaker, by saying a lot of those policies came as a result of policies and directives and decisions, made during some very difficult times in the 1980s, to encourage diversification.

And, Mr. Speaker, the government is right to recognize . . . in recognizing that this is something that we need to continue to encourage, and I give the government credit for that. And the fact that they acknowledge that and that they are certainly willing to work with communities and local people and investing in this province, because that's where the jobs will

come in the future. And that's where the jobs will continue to be made available so that young people across this province can look at Saskatchewan as a place to call home. A place, as the government continues to brag about, the best place to live in all of Canada, while Canada is recognized as one of the best places in the world. And I truly agree with that.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm quite thankful for the fact that I had . . . My forefathers looked at coming to this country. Although as I make my way through the snow and the cold in the middle of March, sometimes I begin to wonder, but you know, it still beats the floods they've had in the States, or it still beats the earthquakes they've had in other parts of the world. We still have a lot to be thankful for.

Mr. Speaker, when the business community of this province asks for a tax roll-back in the E&H (education and health) tax, they do it not because they are saying to the government, forget about the deficit. They do it because they are looking at the economic impact, not only in their businesses but in this province, of a high taxation policy. And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very imperative that the Minister of Finance listen very closely to the concerns that are being raised.

And while the government would say they can't reduce taxes because that's revenue lost, Mr. Speaker, by creating more jobs you have revenue generated rather than revenue lost. And if a reduction of 1 or 2 per cent in the provincial sales tax creates an avenue whereby businesses can be more competitive and create jobs, then I think that has to be viewed and that has to be looked at very strongly.

Because certainly in my area of the province, even though we're along the Manitoba border and there isn't a big difference, there's enough of a difference, Mr. Speaker, whereby residents will look at going to Manitoba and they'll come back with purchases because they saved a few cents on their education tax. And certainly the Alberta model is one that we would all hope to achieve at the end of the day, whereby there's no tax on the E&H system.

And the Minister of Highways talks about health care fees. Well, Mr. Speaker, I talked to residents . . . I was just in Alberta not that long ago, and they're still more than prepared to pay health care fees and maintain and have access to the service they have, than what we have by our taxation policy in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, another area that I want to talk about is the fact this government seems to be hung up with the fact that they've always got to blame somebody else. Why don't they start looking at the fingers that are pointing back at them every time they point the finger at somebody else? They like to point it at the federal government — and rightly so. There are areas where the federal government must be held accountable for their policies. But also, Mr. Speaker, they've got to look at the fact that maybe it's time they pointed at themselves a little bit.

Local governments, taxpayers of this province — while the Minister of Finance has continually told us we haven't increased your taxes, people don't believe it any more, because every time they turn around, there's less in a hip pocket.

There's less money available for the services that they would like to purchase.

This government has, if you will, Mr. Speaker, this government has led the way in offloading taxes and offloading services on local governments and thereby forcing taxpayers through the property tax system to pay more, or pay more through the E&H tax system. They may not have increased the personal income tax that much, Mr. Speaker. You don't have to increase it that much when you're taking major increases and people see their increases in power bills, increases in their energy bills, and increases in their telephone bills to the tune of millions of dollars that come back into the coffers of the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have a problem with Crown corporations if they're providing a service at cost; but they have become a revenue-generator in the province of Saskatchewan. They're a tax burden on the province of Saskatchewan, the people of Saskatchewan. The only area that has maybe given up some of that tax burden is the telephone system, as private companies have been allowed to operate in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there are certainly a lot of initiatives that the people of Saskatchewan have worked with and have come up with to address concerns. And I would like to commend the SADD (Students Against Drinking and Driving) group, or students against drunk driving, for the suggestions that they have put forward over the past number of years, and for the educational program that they have formulated to educate people across this province as to the problems associated with drinking and driving.

And I think as a result of that, just via the media the other day, if I'm not mistaken, we've seen a major decrease in the number of charges for drinking and driving. And I think and I believe that is very positive, and I believe young people involved in this program should take some heart in knowing that because they've taken a stand, because they've provided an avenue whereby they can inform even their peers, that we have had a reduction in the number of fatalities and the number of drinking and driving charges.

And we must compliment people for that. I think many times we forget to give compliments where they are due and compliment people for the work they have done.

Mr. Speaker, but there is one area when it comes to SGI that I have a major concern and I have to raise that — and I'm pleased the minister is available right now to hear this — and that's regarding the no-fault insurance program. And the minister is quite well aware of the fact of the problems being faced by a family who tragically lost a daughter in our constituency on their way as they went to watch their son in a major curling competition.

And, Mr. Speaker, if there's one thing that we as MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and legislators in this province do — and I hope the government really takes a serious look at this as well — if there's one thing that we do, I trust we will seriously look at the no-fault insurance program. There are aspects of the no-fault insurance program that are positive; but

there's one area . . . and it doesn't affect a lot of people, but for the people it affects, it affects them immensely.

And the Markwart family are facing that tragedy. They are facing the tragedy of unfortunately putting their house up for sale and looking at moving into a lower neighbourhood because they've been caught in that limbo area of the no-fault insurance program that doesn't give them the ability to get compensation for the loss that they have incurred as a result of that accident and also the trauma in dealing with the problems.

And I trust that the minister and his colleagues are looking at this and maybe by working together, we can come up with something that helps people who fall between the cracks, because I think that's what happened here. I think in many areas no-fault insurance has worked well. But there's one area of that program that it is not working and I would like to see us as legislators deal with that so we don't leave a handful of people out on the limb.

Mr. Speaker, just lately we've had a lot of criticisms levelled at young people. And while I complimented the group involved in the SADD program, this past week we had the thefts of vehicles — and certainly in the city of Regina — rose to a new level of . . . a new high. And I guess what we have suggested, Mr. Speaker, as an opposition, it's time that there was some, actually some real penalties made available and some ways of addressing this problem that held people accountable.

Mr. Speaker, one has to wonder . . . And just the other day or just yesterday as I was having coffee with an individual, this person told me that his fiancée had come down to meet him and they'd been in the mall having coffee and she went out while he went to do some business in the mall. She had gone out to get into her car to go back to her job or place of employment and she come running right back in. Her car was gone. Her car had been stolen while just . . . in the 15 minutes. This is the middle of the afternoon.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what I'm trying to bring out here is the fact that many of the incidents of car thefts have been conducted by minors. Now one would ask, why is a young offender on the streets when it's school on? Why are they not in school? Shouldn't they be getting their education? Or the 2 and the 3 and the 4 o'clock in the morning, shouldn't they be at home in bed?

(1200)

Where does the responsibility lie? Does the responsibility lie with the law enforcement officers of the city to try and bring some order to this problem? Is it their responsibility?

Or, Mr. Speaker, have we taken away the responsibility from parents to administer discipline? Have we taken that responsibility away from schools to try and encourage and put forward an education and make sure the students are in school getting their education?

Mr. Speaker, I don't know. But it would seem to me that what I have seen over the past number of years, we basically, Mr. Speaker, have taken away more and more of the responsibility

of parents to be accountable and to be responsible for their children's actions.

And as a result, our law enforcement officers are . . . their hands are tied when they have to deal with the circumstances. And I guess I was really made aware of it when the headline in the paper was about the mother decrying the fact that an officer's gun had gone off while he was trying to apprehend a suspect in one of these car thefts.

Now I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, if that parent would have had as much concern for the child and made sure that they were either at home doing something, if it was after school or in school, that officer would not have been put in that situation.

So I think it is imperative, number one, that the Minister of Justice not just say it isn't his responsibility for the Young Offenders Act, which I realize it's a responsibility of the federal government. But I think it's imperative that this legislature and this minister and this government really make it very clear to the federal minister, Mr. Rock, although I suspect he doesn't really want to listen — he hasn't listened very well in the past, and I'm not sure he'll want to listen in the future — but make it very clear to the federal government that something has to be done about the Young Offenders Act.

And number two, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that there be appropriate penalties put in place, especially when we have repeat offenders. It's almost like they are snubbing authority by their actions. I think we need some real penalties put in place.

I also think, Mr. Speaker, and believe that it's time parents took responsibility for their young people as well. I think I have that responsibility to make sure that I train my children in a reasonable way and give them some direction that will cause them to grow up as model citizens. I believe that for all parents as well. And I believe a lot of parents really feel that way.

But you know, one thing I found out. We had that related to us the day of the throne speech by a parent who feels . . . who brought the point up that the fear out there is you don't dare administer discipline, you don't use the strap if you have to if a child is not paying attention, because that child may go to the phone, call 911 and accuse you of child abuse. And something has to be done to address this problem.

There is nothing wrong, Mr. Speaker, with applying rules and having some guidelines and some disciplinary actions available if those rules are broken. If you break the laws of the land, there are rules that say that if you break that law you're held accountable.

Well I think in homes, parents need to set some guidelines. But they also need the tools. And if we as legislators take away those tools, how are they going to help build the generation of tomorrow? And what are we going to have tomorrow?

So it would seem to me, Mr. Speaker, that while this throne speech and the government would suggest it offered a lot of alternatives, there was a lot missing in the throne speech.

It really didn't have, as I indicated earlier, it didn't have a lot to

offer in the area of transportation. It didn't have a lot to offer in the area of education so that educators and the taxpayers, the taxpaying public of this province, could really feel comfortable that we have a handle in the province, in education. Or that communities such as the Windthorsts and Glenavons can feel comfortable that they will have a school facility to continue to operate.

It didn't really offer a lot in the area of health care and access to services. While the member from Weyburn-Big Muddy did talk about one or two individuals that gained immediate access, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you of numerous individuals who are still waiting for specific services like hip replacement.

And for the individual out in my area who's been on the waiting-list for nine months, they're going to say, well how did that person get in? I've been waiting for a bed and all of a sudden I find somebody else is in within a week; what's going on? Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things missing out of this throne speech.

So I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the next few weeks it will be the responsibility of my colleagues and I to bring these points forward to remind the public of what the government as even opposition members promise them and what they voted for in 1991 and 1995; to hold the government accountable but to also provide and bring forward some positive, responsible attitudes and ideas that we can work with to provide a better Saskatchewan in which to live. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure to be able to enter into the debate on the throne speech. And I'd like to begin first of all of course by complimenting the mover of the throne speech, the member from Swift Current, and certainly the seconder, the member from Saskatoon Southeast, for their thoughtful insight and comments.

And I again want to welcome you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and certainly the Speaker to the Assembly. And if I could, I want to take just a minute and offer a bit of praise and compliments to the Speaker who did a tour through the province, and most specifically through our constituency.

I think it certainly helps to dissipate some of the cynicism about politicking and the political process and all of us as politicians, whether we're provincial or federal. Other than now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, etching in the minds for ever of the young children in grade 1 and 2 from my home town of Goodsoil, that Mr. Speaker really is not a politician but rather a pirate. I think that we may well have accomplished something.

May I also take this opportunity to welcome the member from North Battleford. I don't believe that the correct party was elected in that constituency, but I know that he will do his very best to represent one of the nicer regions of Saskatchewan. And I know that he will do his best, as I said, to commit to the people of Saskatchewan to represent them with honour and dignity.

I certainly want to welcome and greet the new pages this year. I think that we tend to take too often for granted the people around us and all of the things that they do. And I would be remiss, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I didn't — especially since she's here — acknowledge and thank the work that my constituency assistants do for me while I'm gone when the session is on: Susan Karpenko, and certainly Judy Eisel who is looking after the office back in Meadow Lake today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — And may I begin by saying also that I would like to say hello to the people of Meadow Lake. This is the first time that the legislature . . . the proceedings in the legislature are being covered live in the constituency of Meadow Lake. I think it's wonderful that this process is now in place and that it allows for the democratic process to be brought just a little bit closure to the people back at home, not only to those who live in close proximity to Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — You know it really quite astounds me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is nearly five and a half years since I've taken my spot in this Assembly, and how time flies. A lot has been accomplished in five and a half years.

We now have a balanced budget. We have debt reduction. We have health reform. We've got job creation. We've got population growth. We've got unprecedented gas and oil exploration. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a wife.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Now to the good people of Saskatchewan, I want to say that balanced budgets and health reform are a priority of mine. To my wife, I want to say that if it hadn't been for balanced budgets and health reform not being a priority of mine, I may not have run, and we would never have met and we'd have never married. So I hope she accepts that logic.

But believe me, Mr. Speaker, our government is prepared for the 21st century as we continue to invest in people. I believe that it truly is a time for hope and optimism in this province, and I think that nowhere is that hope and optimism more apparent than in the constituency that I represent, the constituency of Meadow Lake.

I'd like to talk briefly if I could, Mr. Speaker, about my constituency. Members will know that I probably represent one of the most spectacularly beautiful parts of the province, and as a result, we have many visitors to that area. Recent statistics, Mr. Speaker, will show that over 500 residents of the Meadow Lake constituency are employed directly in tourism-related industries. This is 7.5 per cent of the total employed residents of the Meadow Lake area.

There are 95 tourism businesses and events operating in the Meadow Lake constituency, and that's not including restaurants, gas stations, or the majority of retail operations. Visitors to the area spend an estimated \$25.3 million directly in

our constituency, and the future looks even brighter.

When our government sets jobs as a priority, we deliver, and that certainly is reflected in the Meadow Lake constituency.

As many members have said before me and as many will say for years to come, and they'll all be right, Mr. Speaker, this truly is an honour to be standing here in the legislature of Saskatchewan representing our respective constituencies. It is my regret that everyone in the province doesn't get this opportunity so that they could have some sense of what it's like. It certainly is a learning experience beyond comparison, Mr. Speaker.

So to the good people of the constituency of Meadow Lake, thank you once again for having the confidence in me to allow me to represent you here, and for the wonderful educational opportunity that you've afforded me.

I have learned as much about myself, Mr. Speaker, as I have about others. And I have met some of the finest people in the country here in Saskatchewan. And I certainly have established many friendships, both on this side and on the other side of the Assembly.

I alluded earlier, Mr. Speaker, to the amount of change in our world. It is not like I'm going to talk about the good old days back when I was young not so very many years ago, but let me reflect just a little bit.

When I was younger there were no compact discs, there were no remote controls for TVs, computers took up nearly an entire office. You physically had to go down to your bank or credit union to access your account. Kids wore their baseball hats with the bill frontwards. Come to think of it, as I look across at the third party, that may well be where backward bills first started. I digress.

For the most part, Mr. Speaker, people had the same jobs for an entire lifetime. And believe it or not, there were even some Liberals who believed in medicare. My goodness, how things have changed.

It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, to compare the way our government faces changes, opposed to both the opposition parties. Our response has been to meet and to consult with the people of Saskatchewan and work together towards the year 2000. Their idea is for government to disappear, for elected people to get out of the way — all of this veiled in bringing democracy closer to the people.

I'll tell you what I think it means, Mr. Speaker, what their agenda really is. They want government out of the way so that big business and the corporate elite and their corporate friends can run the province. That's their philosophy in life.

We however, Mr. Speaker, believe that government has to reform itself, restructure itself to meet the current realities, both structural and financial. And we believe that we are doing that, and we are going to do it in consultation with the people of Saskatchewan.

We are not going to follow, Mr. Speaker, and in some ways, Mr. Speaker, I would argue we're not even going to lead. But we are going to work hand in hand with the people of Saskatchewan. In health care, in social services, in education, and in all areas of government, we are heading towards the millennium together.

The Premier has asked the opposition members many times to come and join us — work with us as we work with the people of Saskatchewan for the good of the people of Saskatchewan. Help us go forward, he says.

The third party has been very predictable . . . the third party, I should say, has been very predictable, but at least consistent. Take us back to 1929 they say, back to the days of child labour, of sweatshops, of no women's rights. Take us to Alabama and to Arkansas and even to Alberta, some of them say. I say, Mr. Speaker, take us anywhere but there. Let me say to the Leader of the Third Party, 1929 wasn't a good year in 1929 and it's certainly not going to be a good year in the year 2001.

The official opposition, I want to talk about them for a minute, Mr. Speaker. Where do they stand on anything? They, like the Tories, are opposed to almost anything that we do. They think being opposition, Mr. Speaker, means to offer no alternatives and to oppose everything. Anything the federal government does, Mr. Speaker, they say is okay, especially if the federal government is attacking our province, the province of Saskatchewan.

How, Mr. Speaker, can those members say that they represent Saskatchewan constituencies? Their buddies in Ottawa cut health care, and what do they say? Nothing. They stand up and cheer, Mr. Speaker.

(1215)

Paul Martin and his colleagues say that we need jobs, but no job training programs are there. And they applaud.

The federal Liberals abandon any responsibility for transportation in the West, and they say, right on, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government throws several thousand non-treaty welfare recipients off their rolls and onto ours, and they say that's the way to balance budgets.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is proud to be a province in the country of Canada. Saskatchewan people believe very strong in our federal system. We are grateful that we can contribute to the founding of those institutions which have made Canada the best country in the world in which to live and which have made Saskatchewan the best province in that country.

This is where medicare began in the face of fierce Liberal and Tory resistance, and it is now accepted worldwide.

We believe in national standards, Mr. Speaker, in health care, in education, and in social services, and we believe in a system that we have developed to preserve those standards. That is why, Mr. Speaker, that we object to the federal government refusing to act like a federal government. And that's why we are

constantly amazed that the official opposition can say that we should stop mentioning federal cut-backs. What's a hundred million dollars here or a hundred million dollars there, they say. Yet what do they do? They blame the province when the province has to make difficult choices.

Our commitment, Mr. Speaker, is to the people of Saskatchewan. In 1991 we promised fiscal sanity. That remains our commitment and it is through this measure that we'll be able to invest in people. We have made jobs a top priority, and we are encouraging the expansion of trade, we are promoting expansion and diversification of our rural economy, we are certainly renewing Saskatchewan's Crown corporations, and I find that to be a very interesting and exciting process.

In education we will work to provide educators in our schools with better tools to support learning in the classroom, and we will encourage school division restructuring as the needs are locally determined to improve the efficiency and the quality of our educational system. We will work with business, educators, and communities to implement a made in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, training strategy, building on the strength of SIAT and the regional colleges and our highly successful JobStart and Future Skills programs. In my area, Mr. Speaker, I see evidence of this with training being offered to students working out of the pulp and forest industry — training tailored to their needs.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed also to reducing child poverty and helping people escape from welfare. Our Premier has worked tirelessly on the national scene to implement a new, integrated national child benefit this year. It is disappointing now to see the federal Liberals backing away from their original commitment. None the less, our government is committed in this session, Mr. Speaker, to further strengthen Saskatchewan's nationally and internationally recognized Action Plan for Children which is targeting child poverty and invests in child care in the inner-city neighbourhoods, rural communities, and most important for me, in the North.

On this issue I want to take the opportunity to compliment the Meadow Lake Tribal Council for the tremendous work that they have done in this area. They, like us, could do much more, Mr. Speaker, but I think what they have done so far is very exciting. It is all about local communities taking ownership and assuming responsibilities for resolving problems, and I think that the tribal council has been very progressive in that regard. The tribal council has adopted a holistic approach to improving the wellness of their communities, and to a large degree they have taken the direction that our province is attempting to take.

About 35 per cent of the constituency that I represent, Mr. Speaker, are of aboriginal background, either first nations or Metis. And I want to describe, through a short story, many of the problems that I think that they have and puts in some perspective and helped me understand where the aboriginal people are coming from when they talk about the problems that they have.

There was some number of years ago a gentleman from Patuanak visiting with me and he was . . . By the way, who is only very slightly older than I am. He would be about a year or two older than I am, so the story that I'm going to tell you

doesn't take place several hundreds of years ago.

An Hon. Member: — He's not an elder then?

Mr. Sonntag: — He was from . . . In actual fact he is an elder which, to learn about the first nations background, you don't have to be an old person to be an elder. So he's a leader in his community.

He told me that he lived in the small community of Patuanak most recently. But anyway, he was telling me that he grew up down the Churchill River, about 50 or 60 miles down the Churchill River, and when he was six years old, one August morning an Indian agent came into the community by boat — the only access was by boat — picked him up and took him away, a hundred miles away, when he was six years old.

I had the opportunity to canoe down the Churchill River about, I think it was about five or six years ago with some friends of mine. And on my way down I realized . . . It suddenly reminded me, as we were going through here, that we were in fact going to canoe through the very community that Louis had told me about, and in fact we had a very detailed map. And as we got closer, I could see the little community on the river-bank and there would have been about 15 or 20 older houses there. There was nobody living there. I think occasionally during the summer they used it for fishing camps.

But we stopped and pulled up onto the river-bank and got out and walked around this community. And the other three people that were with me walked away and I stopped and stood there — and it was almost like a religious experience for me, Mr. Speaker — but as I stopped and stood there, it suddenly all . . . It put things in perspective for me.

It struck me suddenly that in this little community of 10 houses, this young boy, his whole existence was this community and his family and probably a radius of 10 miles around this community. He knew nothing more than that. And to realize that this little boy stood in the very spot that I stood and to have an Indian agent to come in, when you're six years old, to be removed from your entire world and to pulled away from your family at that young age would have an impact on him that it would be unbelievable. And his line to me — although he wasn't even horribly bitter, which I didn't understand — but what he said to me was "and they wonder why we have problems sometimes."

Well, it put the whole thing in perspective for me. Here's a gentleman, who's virtually the same age as I am, who had been pulled out of his community. And it made me understand just a little bit better what life for a first nations person, especially in the far North, must be like. I mean I have no true understanding, but to be able to stand in that environment and understand what happened to this young fellow made it just a little bit easier for me to understand.

And now when I hear the criticisms and the complaints coming from the aboriginal community and from the white community, it just puts into perspective a little bit better what life really must be like for some of them. And I think that it went a long ways for me to help understand what some of the problems that

they face are all about.

Anyway I want to carry on and talk a bit more about the throne speech. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think that Saskatchewan is years ahead, is years ahead of other jurisdictions, I should say, in renewal, and we can therefore now focus on stabilizing and securing the health system which is solid on its new foundations, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend and compliment the boards and staff now, Mr. Speaker, and certainly the doctors of the Twin Rivers and the Northwest Health Districts. I may be biased but I believe that they most often have led the province in health renewal.

In the Northwest Health District, for instance, they've just completed a three-year accreditation award. Very recently our Minister of Health was in Meadow Lake and I don't think I'd be putting words in his mouth by saying that he was very impressed by the dedication of the board and the health care providers of our community.

In St. Walburg, Mr. Speaker, in the Twin Rivers District, the community has gone through some very difficult times and it has been hard on them. But now they are pulling together in the potential construction of an integrated facility. The community is looking at adding a wing to their long-term care facility in an effort to provide a community clinic that will better serve the community of St. Walburg. This has not been very easy for any of them, but as I talk to many of them now, they feel that they are now much better off than they were before.

On a related issue, Mr. Speaker, because this affects our health care system, and of course our health, I was so pleased with yourself, Mr. Speaker, to be able to attend yesterday the SADD luncheon. That's the Students Against Drinking and Driving. They certainly are a wonderful bunch of folks and deserve a lot of credit from all of us here. And they were, I won't say instrumental, but they were very, very key in helping us articulate and put in place the legislation that we have today.

And to see the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities down in the first five months by over 30 per cent is truly remarkable, and if we could maintain that level of improvement, it will be nothing short of a miracle, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

So I want to thank the minister responsible for SGI who helped to pilot this legislation through the Assembly. And I want to thank you again, Mr. Speaker, who led the all-party committee around the province taking briefs and hearing the presentations and representations from hundreds of people. And most of all, I want to thank the people, many of whom who have suffered far too much.

I would like to switch gears if I could very briefly to talk about agriculture, but most specifically the issue of transportation. While the elimination of the Crow benefit is outrageous and the loss of those funds to the province is unacceptable, what is most unacceptable is a federal government with a complete lack of vision of any sort for a national transportation policy, Mr. Speaker.

On an issue like this that is clearly a national issue — that is, the movement of goods and services across our country — they simply wipe their hands. They say, here provinces, you look after it. This is, in my estimation, Mr. Speaker, unforgivable. Even in the United States, which the federal and provincial Liberals seem determined to copy, even they pay for 80 per cent of the national road system, and they do have a strategy in place. But here in Canada, Mr. Speaker, even on the national highways, the federal government now provides virtually no funding.

In a province with more roads than Alberta and Manitoba combined and with barely a quarter of the population, what do they do? They do absolutely nothing. And what's the provincial Liberals' response? They say 1 800 Bump. That's their response, Mr. Speaker.

Look, we know the roads need repair, Mr. Speaker. But I think it's a waste of taxpayers' dollar to put in a toll free number. My suggestion, Mr. Speaker, would be for the Liberals to put in a few dollars into a phone call and phone their federal cousins in Ottawa and ask them to put some money back into a national transportation system and national transportation strategy.

A friend of mine suggested that we should be filling the holes with Liberals, Mr. Speaker. But first of all, he thought there might not be enough Liberals to fill the holes; and secondly, he said that even if there were, they'd be fighting over who would be on top.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I may not be fair. Maybe I'm not being fair about this but if the truth be known, there really are a number of Liberals over there who actually do have . . . actually have hearts of gold, Mr. Speaker. However, their logic on issues would suggest to me that their minds on occasion may also be made of some precious metal.

And so, Mr. Speaker, on that note, I want to say that I look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the legislature during this upcoming session. Our government has put into the throne speech its key priorities for the session: action to create jobs and build the economy; strengthening education and training at every level; certainly reducing child poverty is a priority; we're looking at a radical reform within the social services and within the welfare system; we want to continue to build a stable, secure, high-quality health care system; we want to implement a comprehensive transportation strategy; and most of all, to maintain our commitment — fiscal responsibility.

Our province is truly on the move again. We are investing in people, jobs, and communities and we are building Saskatchewan together.

I will certainly be supporting the vote on the throne speech and be voting against the amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1230)

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to once again join in debate in this House on this occasion of the

reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, before beginning my remarks though, I'd just like to add my welcome to my new colleague, the member from North Battleford. I'm sure the members of this House will find the new member an able debater, an intelligent thinker, and an individual whose commitment to public service is beyond question.

I'm also pleased to welcome the community of Gravelbourg in my constituency today. As you well know, Mr. Speaker, Gravelbourg has joined the list of many communities across this province who can now watch the proceedings of this Assembly live in their own homes. For those with cable, it's my hope that this service will be well used and that from time to time they'll flick to channel 13 and see how MLAs are dealing with public affairs.

This service is important, Mr. Speaker, for all too often we rely on the media to tell us what's going on in an increasingly complex world. We've seen the media suffer tremendous cuts in recent times, making the job of conveying matters of public concern a more difficult one.

With the introduction of television service to many communities and access to the legislative, government, and caucus sites on the web, those wishing to acquire a direct view of the public issues have a greater opportunity to do so. Mr. Speaker, I believe these advancements will serve the public well.

As members of this House we must always remember the debt of gratitude we owe to the many people who take the time to voice their opinions, to write, or to call us. Whether it be criticism, a helpful suggestion, or positive feedback, Mr. Speaker, we must acknowledge the care and concern which these numerous members of the public demonstrate for the public good. They've taken a great deal of time to inform themselves of public issues and more often than not they end up informing us. Thousands of individuals spend countless hours of their own time thinking and questioning ways of making this province a better place in which to live. By taking the time to phone us, many of these people are taking action to give effect to their ideas. We should always remember to be thankful for their participation because it's such participation which makes democracy in Saskatchewan work.

Mr. Speaker, while the members on the government side have and will continue to congratulate themselves and their government for this throne speech, many important concerns remain unaddressed. Since we last sat in this House, Mr. Speaker, I have had many opportunities to meet and correspond with my constituents. Many of their concerns were completely ignored in the fuzzy text of this throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are concerned about what this government intends to do with respect to the municipal grants. Many continue to deal with the difficulties of reassessment. They remain very worried that this government will carry through on its plan to introduce the promised \$20 million cut to municipal grants. Such a cut represents a significant attack on the funding base of many municipalities in

the constituency of Thunder Creek. One RM council told me earlier that if the cut goes through they'll be left to find some 13,000 extra dollars from their ratepayers as there are no further areas in which they are able to cut.

These same municipalities also remain worried about the possibility of municipal amalgamations. Some, Mr. Speaker, are worried that they will be forced to absorb hamlets within their borders. The south-west area of the province is one of the most hard hit by population loss, Mr. Speaker, so such hamlets are significant in number. That would not be so much of a problem for many of these people except for the fact that some of these hamlets have abandoned gas stations with buried fuel tanks which no longer meet environmental standards. And these municipalities are already under enough financial pressure and they can't afford to pay any more to help dig up these hazardous tanks.

Mr. Speaker, another issue which was not dealt with in the throne speech is the matter of the upcoming spring run-off. While the Tories are excited that spring might fill the multimillion dollar boondoggles that they created in Rafferty and Alameda, many of the constituents are very concerned about what the upcoming thaw might bring. Three of the waterways which threaten to have the highest run-off in the province are in my constituency, Mr. Speaker: Long Creek, the Moose Jaw River, and Wood River all threaten to overrun their banks.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, rural municipalities in areas like Morse and Moose Jaw face the problem of having roads washed out. Still other communities, like Pense, face the problem of rising waters around their village limits. Last year, Mr. Speaker, water came dangerously close to flooding many buildings in the village of Pense. Many sloughs are full and many drainage ditches continue to be clogged.

Mr. Speaker, my concern here is whether or not enough is being done to prepare for this problem. Is Sask Water prepared for the flood and is this government prepared to offer municipalities the help they need to deal with the aftermath after destructive events?

Mr. Speaker, I think I'll refer any calls I get after the floods hit to the Deputy Premier across, because it sounds like he's quite prepared for the upcoming floods; so I'm sure he'll be appreciative of hearing these calls and he'll direct them on to the appropriate authorities.

But, Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also concerned about health care. Over the last year many people took the opportunity to write or phone me to express their concerns over the future of their health system. In many cases people are worried for their own families. My constituencies have seen friends and neighbours fall through the cracks of the health system, and they are deeply concerned that someday it could be them.

Last year in this House we raised some of these concerns, only to receive a less than understanding response from the minister. One of the minister's officials even suggested, Mr. Speaker, and I quote, that: "Every fallen sparrow will be laid at the feet of health reform."

Well I'm sure that the friends and families of people who have had to wait for treatment for extended periods or people who have received poor treatment thanks to health reform are less than pleased to hear that their loved ones are no more important than a fallen sparrow.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this government must do more to show that it's truly caring of the sick and the elderly. The goal of our health system should be to have no one fall through the cracks. Quality health care is not too high a goal. It should be expected. Aside from their concerns about seeing their loved ones fall through the cracks, Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also concerned about the funding of their local health districts. Last year this government kicked in some small additional monies. The money, however, went to pay off debt or to non-operational programs, and it won't be forthcoming in future years.

My constituents have watched while government services were taken out of their communities, and they're concerned that the trend will continue. South-west Saskatchewan's population will include more seniors per capita than any other region in the province. And as a result, Mr. Speaker, people are deeply worried that the present funding system will cost them some of the few facilities they still have left.

Needs-based funding remains in place, Mr. Speaker. Under this system, a district whose residents travel to the cities like Regina and Saskatoon for care will see its funding cut in future years. In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, the health districts of Rolling Hills, Moose Jaw, Thunder Creek, and the South Country are all facing this very problem. The system of cutting grants that are based on the number of patients that travel out of the district to access services is unfair. Rural people need to be guaranteed that there will be a certain level of local services available. This system is nothing more than a means of ridding Saskatchewan of small but desperately needed rural hospitals and care homes.

The short-sighted aspect of this policy is that it fails to recognize that farming is one of the most hazardous occupations in the province, Mr. Speaker. Little time is often available to deal with the victim of a farm accident. While first responders help, the presence of a hospital provides a sense of security to many rural people which is essential to the stability of those agricultural communities.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also deeply concerned about highways and transportation. My colleague from Wood River recently has launched the pothole patrol program to bring attention to the plight of our rural highways. While he asked people to count potholes, the program really does bring attention to the overall crumbling state of our highways.

I know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite would like to blame the problem — like many others — on the federal government. And while they blame this on the feds they have to recognize that their government has made sure . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order, order. The hon. member has obviously a number of other members who'd like to join him in a debate, and as good luck will have it, we still have some time available. And I'll ask hon. members to put

their remarks on the record and not shout them across the floor.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess there is some truth to that adage that the truth does hurt, from the howls across the floor.

While they continue to blame the feds on . . . They have to recognize that their government has made choices over the years to spend money on other less important priorities and it's more often than not ones that were in the Crown sector. They must also realize that since Ottawa passed responsibility for dominion lands to the prairie provinces, at the request of the provinces, Saskatchewan has sole responsibility over its own roads.

It's always nice when someone else pays for something, but in our personal lives we realize that when a payment is due we have to pay it ourselves. We don't wait for some generous relative to come by and foot the bill. If it means spending more effectively elsewhere and getting rid of risky investments and lower priority spending in the Crown sector, then so be it, Mr. Speaker.

The bill for our highways, Mr. Speaker, has certainly come due. In my own constituency, many highways are in a sad state of repair. Worse yet, they were poorly maintained during yet another difficult Saskatchewan winter.

A woman from Chaplin phoned me recently and said that she knows of some 20 people who have crashed or rolled their cars during the winter season, thanks to the weather. She was appalled to discover the other day just how few clearing operations this government allows its highway crews to complete.

Mr. Speaker, she had left for a hockey tournament in Kindersley at about 3 in the afternoon and the No. 1 was icy and covered with finger drifts and quite dangerous. And when she returned home at 2 a.m. from the tournament, she was alarmed to discover that really nothing had been done to rectify the situation.

If the minister of SGI wants to do something constructive to preventing rising automobile insurance rates, get the Minister of Highways to clear the highways more often. In addition his colleagues, the ministers responsible for Municipal Government and Finance, could reconsider their cuts to the local government grants. If the municipalities have funds needed to clear roads, then we just might have a few less accidents.

Mr. Speaker, almost every highway in my constituency is a source of problems. Highways 363, No. 2, No. 19, are often very dangerous. The highways which lead to tourist attractions at Claybank and Avonlea are in a shameful state. Apparently the government wants tourism, but it doesn't want to make it possible for tourists to travel to the attractions.

Other people have often called me and they say they remain deeply disappointed that the No. 1 remains a single lane on either end of the province. With increasing truck traffic, they are worried that travelling to destinations like Winnipeg and Calgary is often a gamble with one's life.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, a province which relies on its transportation system for its survival should consider reviewing its priorities to give highways the attention that they deserve.

Other issues remain unaddressed in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker. But before I allude to any more, Mr. Speaker, the coyote population in Thunder Creek wants to wish the Minister of Environment a hardy thank you for feeding them this winter. Thanks to the minister's additional fee on hunting licences, there were plenty more deer available this winter. All they had to do to get a good meal was chase a deer down in that deep snow and they were very pleased with the meal available.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, a number of my constituents remain very upset about this charge and ranchers remain less than pleased with the compensation program. Add to this the fact that this government recently closed down a waterfowl feeding station in the RM of Rodgers. My constituents are disappointed with these decisions, and they would like to see the government deal with wildlife damage and wildlife management in a more equitable manner.

The final concern which I'd like to touch upon today deals with our Crown corporations. The throne speech suggested the government was going to get down to the job of reforming the Crowns for the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Part of the proposed course of action appears to involve the government allowing the Crowns more freedoms, including freedom to operate beyond Canada's borders. Apart from my concerns with the lack of accountability, Mr. Speaker, this whole approach ignores the original role of our Crowns and what our Crowns were really, truly designed for. While SaskTel builds a cable network in Chicago and Detroit, Mr. Speaker, the communities of Ardill and Parkbeg will still face hurdles and difficulties in acquiring basic phone services in the form of a public pay phone, in a phone for their community hall.

(1245)

In Ardill, SaskTel officials took away the public pay phone — the only pay phone in between Moose Jaw and Mossbank, which, Mr. Speaker, you'll know it as a long and lonely stretch of highway. It's the only one that was available in that whole area. Mr. Speaker, the owner of the Ardill Hotel had to take the unusual step of paying for this line herself — a public pay phone.

Mr. Speaker, when individuals have to pay for a phone line when our phone company is adventuring in faraway lands, it's obvious that the Crowns have forgotten their role of providing essential services on a universal basis to Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents are also concerned about SaskPower. They hear of many raises to less-than-deserving SaskPower executives, while they pay more for power. They're annoyed to learn that this government is considering investing in South American power systems while at the same time saying they don't have enough money to replace above-ground

power lines back home. While SaskPower considers providing power in South America, ageing above-ground power lines are snapping back home and putting farmers' and home-owners' safety in jeopardy.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, my constituents are concerned how Crown utilities and other government agencies are driving up farm input costs. And I know the Minister of Agriculture has mentioned that he has some concerns for this. I question his genuine nature in that regard. But while the ministers of Agriculture and Highways have expressed concern for the issue, I really don't see them doing that much to really, truly deal with it. For countless years they have been raising utility rates and investing in companies that hold farmers at their mercy for key inputs. Mr. Speaker, any reforms to our Crown sector must deal with the problem of rising farm input costs, among other issues.

Mr. Speaker, before I close ... I'll close by seeing the vagaries in this Speech from the Throne have failed to deal with many problems facing my constituents. And you have my assurances that over the coming weeks, I'll continue to raise these issues and encourage the government to act on their behalf. And thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to support the throne speech, which has been called by many the best throne speech that they've ever heard.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — And that's because it's a speech that's in touch with the pulse of today. I want to talk for a moment about the new member. Congratulations to the member from North Battleford. But I thought it was very revealing that one of his first comments in his maiden speech was to invite all the disaffected Tories to move over and join the Liberal Party.

This is not new to us. However because there are some new members, there may be some in the legislature who have never heard the story that likens the Liberal and Tory parties to a chicken standing in the snow. One leg is the Liberals and one leg is the Tories. And when the Tory leg gets too cold standing in the snow, it lifts its leg and it stands on its Liberal leg. And then after a while the Liberal leg gets cold and it puts its Tory leg back down and it lifts its Liberal leg. And the moral of the story is: different legs, same old chicken. The fact is that in between snowstorms, the chicken hops on one leg across to the other hen-house.

The Speaker: — Order.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to, for a minute, look at the Liberal record.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. Order. I think all hon. members on government side and on opposition side will recognize that the minister has the floor. And members can put their remarks on the record; they don't need to be shouting them across the floor. And I'll ask all hon. members to let the hon. member be heard.

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Yes, you'd think, Mr. Speaker, that after this party had received one turncoat who's caused them a lot of grief, that they would think twice before they invite other people to the party. But I guess that's a judgement that they'll have to make.

But I want to look at this Liberal record for a moment — this one that they're so proud of. In the February 8 *Globe and Mail*, Mr. Speaker, unemployment has now hovered above 9 per cent for 76 consecutive months. This is the worst stretch since the Depression — since the Depression — the absolute worst performance by any government since the Depression. The Liberal provinces have the worst unemployment record in Canada, ranging from 14 per cent to 21 per cent.

Where is unemployment the lowest? Does anybody know? In Saskatchewan, under an NDP government, and we're not even finished yet.

I want to mention that, following the recent federal budget, the after-tax income for Canadians is 1,100 less per average Canadian, with Ontario recording the greatest decline. Debt is up 1,300 per person in Canada after all the federal government's deficit and debt reduction efforts. Economist Lester Thurow has said this, "Today the share of wealth held by the top 1 per cent of the population, more than 40 per cent, is essentially double what it was in the mid-1970s."

And this is back to where it was in the 1920s before the introduction of progressive taxation. So what I'd like to ask you folks is, what is this progress under Liberal and Tory governments? This is the federal Liberal government that gives a little and takes a lot, and it's returned Canada to the 1920s. I don't know about my colleagues, but if I want nostalgia I rent an old movie. I don't try to return the whole country to the past in order to enjoy myself.

And what's the response of the Saskatchewan Liberals to this dismal job creation record? I have a guessing question for you here. The member from the Liberal caucus opposite gave this quote, and maybe you can guess who it is. I'll tell you the answer after. This is the quote, "If the NDP government is truly serious about this issue it will have to rethink its present tax policies, cumbersome regulation, and intrusive labour legislation," said Liberal economic development critic, the member from Melfort-Tisdale. This was in the February 8 *Leader-Post*.

Now when I read this, I wondered which cumbersome regulations he has in mind. Would he like to eliminate occupational health and safety? Maybe the provisions against sexual and racial harassment. Or maybe it would be Workers' Compensation to provide for workers injured on the job. Maybe he'd get rid of parental and maternity leaves, minimum wage, labour standards, pension benefits. Perhaps he's not in favour of equal pay for work of equal value. Or maybe he would just eliminate The Trade Union Act. I'm very curious to know which of these important pieces of legislation and policies that he finds so onerous.

I'd like to remind the member from Melfort-Tisdale that it's

workers who produce the products and services and buy the houses and spend the money that supports a consumer society. They're not disposable. And when they lose confidence and quit spending, the economy suffers. In our Premier's six-point plan for Canada, he refers to the need to level up and not down. And I'll quote:

Nobody wins when jurisdictions compete to provide greater tax breaks to business or to force concessions in the wages and working conditions of Canadian families. Nobody wins in a race to the bottom.

So maybe it's time the member opposite quit working on reducing the well-being of working people and instead joined with us to seek more regional and national solutions to these issues — solutions for improving the standards and benefits for working families, rather than levelling them down. What we need is a national debate on this issue if the dynamism of capitalism is to be harnessed for the common good.

The record of Liberals and Tories does not give us much hope on these issues as incomes decline, wealth inequity increases, and joblessness dogs them.

And what is the member from Arm River and the Leader of the Liberal Party recommending we do to preserve national standards? I think we know, but I'll remind you in case you've forgotten your positions on these things. They want us to set up privatized health services — one service for the rich and another for the poor. Our objective as a government is to have the best universally accessible system of health care we can afford for all of our citizens.

In the recent budget, the federal government would've had to put 1.5 billion back into health care to meet what our government has already done in Saskatchewan. Their own health commission recommended that their target for 11 billion for Canada is not enough and that it should be 12.5 billion. Perhaps the member should concentrate less on privatizing health care and creating a two-tier system and more on ensuring that federal Liberals maintain their commitment to a strong public system.

I like the quote of my friend and colleague from Moose Jaw Wakamow who recently during question period said, the Liberals never did understand medicare.

We need to build a society where everyone is fairly included in the benefits of economic growth.

I have a friend who's taking her doctoral degree in history right now. And the subject she's writing on is the social responses to economic upheaval in the 1930s. And I asked her what she's found out so far. And she said that where governments were unable to respond, the community came up with many of the solutions for that time. At that time those solutions led to credit unions, to cooperatives, and to church-organized social aid.

But today as we look towards a future that's unpredictable and face the reality of many of the economic rules and social supports changing, it's again important to look to the community for innovations that can be extended to the larger

society.

And I believe that many of the solutions are coming out of our communities today, Mr. Speaker. The Premier recently dedicated an award to all of the people of Saskatchewan that our province received from the Child Welfare League of Canada and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies — the Champion for Children Award that honours many thousands of Saskatchewan residents who contribute so much time and energy to the well-being of our children, and through a program unique to our province, the Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children.

Now with community groups, agencies, individuals, and governments working together, and a fresh approach within government, we're making great progress on this particular area.

But I want to, just for a minute, as Minister responsible for the Status of Women, talk about the strong role that women play in the delivery of these services in the community. Despite the advances that we've made in equity, there's no question that women are still the primary care-givers in the community. And they're ensuring that children, the victims of abuse and violence, and those without resources, the children on the street, the families in need of support, the children in need of early childhood attention, have the necessary services in the community.

And I consider it a great honour that I have, in the opposition, a critic who also understands the importance of women and women's voices in the work that's done in the province.

Recently Marilyn Waring, who's an economist — who actually was one of the youngest women ever elected to the New Zealand legislature — likened governments creating policy without the perspectives of women like walking through the world with one eye closed. And I thought it was a particularly apt expression.

She also added another humorous part, that developing women's policy in government is kind of like herding sheep — you move a few on one side forward, and you move a few on the other side forward, and you hope that while you're slowly moving them forward that no one retreats on you. And I thought it was a particularly apt description.

But there's no question that the women who are providing these services in our communities are dealing with the dynamics of a modern society where there's more two-income parents, there's more single parents, and there's large elements of the community who are still dealing with early childhood abuse and violence issues. So it's really important that we ensure that the resources are there for these people that are doing this important work.

Mr. Speaker, with that I'll have to save the balance of my comments, I believe, for Monday and ask that we now do adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — I would simply ask all hon. members to make sure this weekend to, if they can, get home and enjoy some time with their family and their constituents and to take a little time to relax, and return with new vigour next week.

The House adjourned at 12:59 p.m.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Osika	175
McPherson	175
Hillson	175
Goohsen	175
Heppner	175
Toth	175
D'Autremont	176

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk	176
-------------	-----

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Goohsen	176
Draude	176

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Bjornerud	176
Lingenfelter	176
Wiens	176
Sonntag	176

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Business Technology Achievements in Saskatoon	
Lorje	176
Support for Saskatchewan Roughriders	
Krawetz	177
Agri-Food Innovation Fund and University of Saskatchewan Agreement	
Koenker	177
Benefit for Tyrone Parislau	
Osika	177
Agricultural Diversification Opportunities	
Whitmore	177
Winning Strategy for Saskatchewan Roughriders	
D'Autremont	178
Enhanced Business Training for Low Income Women	
Kowalsky	178
80th Anniversary of Abdication of Last Russian Czar	
Hillson	178

ORAL QUESTIONS

Proposed Regina School Closures	
Krawetz	178
Lingenfelter	178
MacKinnon	179
Education and Industry	
Draude	179
Lingenfelter	180
Romanow	180
Regina Murder Case	
Toth	180
Nilson	180
Provincial Sales Tax	
Heppner	181
MacKinnon	181
Environmental Handling Charges	
D'Autremont	181
MacKinnon	181
Dialysis Treatment in East-Central Saskatchewan	
Bjornerud	182
Cline	182

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 11 — The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 1997	
Mitchell	183

Bill No. 12 — The Farm Financial Stability Amendment Act, 1997	
Upshall	183
Bill No. 13 — The Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan Amendment Act, 1997	
Upshall	183
Bill No. 14 — The Water Corporation Amendment Act, 1997	
Lautermilch	183
Bill No. 15 — The Department of Health Amendment Act, 1997	
Cline	183
MOTIONS	
Saskatchewan Roughriders	
Romanow	183
Krawetz	184
D'Autremont	184
ORDERS OF THE DAY	
SPECIAL ORDER	
ADJOURNED DEBATES	
ADDRESS IN REPLY	
Bradley	185
Toth	189
Sonntag	194
Aldridge	198
Crofford	201