

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Hon. Assembly of Saskatchewan in the legislature assembled, the petition of the undersigned concerned citizens of Saskatchewan humbly sheweth that:

Whereas the provincial government has stated its commitment to address issues of poverty and unemployment in Saskatchewan; and

Whereas the provincial government is responsible for the administration of funds for employment assistance services under the Employment Insurance Act, and through their narrow interpretations of the Act are affecting 80 per cent of the women presently receiving services from Working for Women in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, by denying them access to the counselling skills and resources needed by women in poverty to gain employment and education; and

Whereas the same free services are being continued in other provinces;

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to continue the services of Working for Women in Saskatoon for the 16-year history of successfully providing cost-effective, accessible services to women in poverty by reducing their barriers to training and employment.

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

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to table on behalf of people in Saskatoon, Regina, Lumsden, Vanscoy, Prince Albert, and so forth on their behalf today. Thank you.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to join with the member from Greystone in adding petitions for women concerned with the elimination of Working for Women in Saskatoon:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to continue the services for Working for Women, Saskatoon, who have a 16-year history of successfully providing cost-effective, accessible services to women in poverty by reducing their barriers to training and employment.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people who have signed this petition are from Watrous, Simpson, and Young.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of concerned citizens with respect to the youth offenders Act, and I read the prayer:

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

I present this on behalf of people of the city of Regina.

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

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of conscientious and concerned citizens of Saskatchewan regarding the victimization of our children through the child prostitution trade. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reform provincial legislation that may help save the lives of children who are being exploited for sex in public places, and stop prostitution which jeopardizes the safety of all citizens and their children.

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

The petitioners are from throughout the city of Regina, Mr. Speaker, and also from Pilot Butte, Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I also present petitions from concerned citizens on the issue of youth crime. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to create a special task force to aid the government in its fight against the escalating problem of youth crime in Saskatchewan in light of the most recent wave of property crime charges; 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.

The petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by residents of Regina, Southey, White City, McLean, and Pense.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to present on behalf of hundreds of people from the province of Saskatchewan the following petition which I will read the prayer of:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to recognize the hardships imposed on people of Saskatchewan and immediately take responsibility already demonstrated by the admission of its mistake; and further, make amendments and exemptions to The Labour Standards Act of Saskatchewan's parents and seniors, families, disabled people, and care-givers or domestic help so that families can decide together what is acceptable in their private residences and not have any additional costs imposed on them on that agreement by government.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the volumes of numbers that we have in this petition speak to the issue and its importance.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too wish to present petitions to this Assembly, and I'll 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, we get ongoing petitions every day, and today I have petitions signed by people from Midale and Saskatoon, Birch Hills, Big River, Hudson Bay, a number of other communities in the province.

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 Eastend, from Webb, from Gull Lake, from Regina, more from Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased as well to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan people with regard to the PST (provincial sales tax) and the reduction of the PST. And these petitioners come from all over Saskatchewan. These particular ones are from the Swift Current, Wilkie, Saskatoon, Regina areas of the province. I'm pleased to present on their behalf today.

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

support the creation of regional telephone exchanges; and

Of citizens petitioning the Assembly to immediately amend The Non-profit Corporations Act to protect volunteers; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reduce the PST by two points.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, the direct debt reduction Act.

And if I may, while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, the balanced budget amendment Act, 1997.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move the first reading of a Bill, the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement revocation Act.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 14 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: how much money was returned to the provincial government by collection agency or agencies hired by the province for the purpose of collection of delinquent Saskatchewan student loans in 1994; (2) how much was outstanding to the province in delinquent student loans in '94; (3) what collection agency or agencies were hired in 1994 for the purpose of collection of delinquent student loans; and (5) what percentage is paid to these collection agencies for the collection of delinquent Saskatchewan student loans?

I have similar questions for 1995 and 1996.

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day 14 ask the government the following question:

To the Hon. Minister of Justice: how much was collected in land titles fees in 1996; what were the operating expenditures of the land titles system in 1996; how much was collected in personal property registry fees in 1996; and what were the operating expenses for the personal property registry in 1996?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, a group of adult students visiting today from the Saskatoon Open Door Society.

Immigrants to Canada come to find new opportunities and a new life for themselves and their families. When they arrive in our country however, they may also find a culture and a society much different from that of their native homes. As such, the Saskatoon Open Door Society exists to welcome and assist

these new immigrants to become informed and effective participants in our Canadian society.

As part of their study of government, this group is visiting our province's legislature to see and experience the daily working of the Legislative Assembly. Following the visit to our gallery today, they will be given a tour of the Legislative Building. I look forward to meeting with them later to share their impressions. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to warmly welcome our special guests from the Saskatoon Open Door Society.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have in our gallery today three very active members of Regina's North Central Community Society who are extremely busy preparing their North Central Community Walk For Freedom. The walk takes place this Sunday, March 23, at 1 p.m. starting in Victoria Park.

These people are working very hard to raise awareness of the child prostitution problems in their area, and I commend them for their work.

I ask the members of this Assembly to join with me in welcoming Nancy Harvey, Peter Lewis, and Carrie Quangtakoune.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You will notice a very fine group of young people sitting in the west gallery, and it's my pleasure to introduce them to you and through you to my colleagues in the legislature today. These are a group of 58 grade 8 students from MacNeill School in Regina. They are accompanied by their teachers, Jim Harrop and Ron Schindel

I know they will be here for question period and then they will have a tour of the building. And I really look forward to meeting with them later on this afternoon to get their impressions of what happens here today. So please join me in welcoming them here. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to introduce to you and to all members of the legislature a guest sitting in your gallery — Morris Werziak, who is the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, the largest UFCW local in Saskatoon. Morris is the president of the Intercon unit, and I would like to welcome him on behalf of all of us to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Babysitting Back Pay Compensation for Parents

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, many parents in our province continue to play a frustrating waiting

game, and I commend them on their patience and their perseverance. Many of them that are here with us today are waiting for the NDP (New Democratic Party) government to compensate them for the thousands of dollars that they face because of claims for back pay from babysitters.

The government has taken the first step by admitting it was their error, and now it's time for the government to take another honourable step forward and pay for its mistake. But so far, Mr. Speaker, all the government is willing to do is monitor the situation and then decide how many claims there are and what the settlements will be.

Mr. Speaker, parents should not have to wait for compensation. They can't put their lives on hold. They still have to pay their bills and feed their families. And so, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal opposition has come up with the plan to address the issue. The government members opposite could forgo the \$4,200 in additional salary that they will receive this year and use that money to compensate parents.

I look forward to getting input from the government, Mr. Speaker, on this simple, effective solution.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nipawin Seed Firm Expansion

Hon. Mr. Renaud: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about a new and rapidly growing business in my constituency in the community of Nipawin.

Newfield Seeds recently announced a \$750,000 expansion of its existing seed plant in the sales operation section. This expansion means a new retail store and sales offices will be added to Nipawin as well as warehouses in Nipawin and Porcupine Plain.

Further to the ... Nipawin seeds plans to upgrade existing warehouses and build a bulk seed plant very shortly. These additions will allow Newfield Seeds to concentrate its sales focus on forage production and become more established in the ag chemical retail market.

If you drive into the Nipawin area, Mr. Speaker, you will notice the fields there are full of little, colourful houses. Many people ask me what they are — and that's the home of leafcutter bees, Mr. Speaker, and they're used in the production of alfalfa seed.

This is another example of Newfield Seeds' commitments to the producers of the north-east, Mr. Speaker. As part of the agri-food week in Saskatchewan, this new expansion will mean easier and better access to producers, the expansion of a business, and more jobs for more people.

Construction will begin immediately and should be completed this fall. Mr. Speaker, this is good economic news for the Nipawin area. It will create nearly 39 new jobs and boost the confidence into the existing economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tisdale Farm Equipment Business Expansion

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge a very successful business in my constituency. John Bob Farm Equipment of Tisdale recently celebrated their grand reopening in recognition of a 13,000 square foot expansion to their shop area. The expansion was started in September, 1996 and just completed.

Bob Penner and John McShannock are the original owners, establishing John Bob Farm Equipment in 1980. On Thursday, March 13, John Bob held their official ribbon cutting ceremonies. Approximately 700 people attended the open house, showing us the tremendous impact that our small businesses have in rural communities.

Please join me in congratulating John McShannock and Bob Penner on their commitment to Saskatchewan business and on their recent expansion to John Bob Farm Equipment in Tisdale. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tourism Careers for Youth Program

Mr. Thomson: — Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with the Liberal member opposite in talking about some of the good things that are happening in our Saskatchewan economy.

Yesterday there was an announcement of the results to date of the tourism careers for youth program. This is a very important program and so far the results are very impressive. More than 90 Saskatchewan youth have already completed this program and more than 60 of them have found jobs.

This is a tribute not only to the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council but also to the young people of this province who have worked hard to prepare themselves for the future.

Tourism in Saskatchewan has experienced impressive growth over the past few years, Mr. Speaker. In fact Saskatchewan's tourism industry generates approximately a billion dollars a year in tourism expenditures and provides more than 40,000 full-time and part-time jobs for Saskatchewan people. This represents — and I know the members opposite will be interested in this — this represents approximately 1 in every 12 employees in the province.

The tourism industry, Mr. Speaker, is also becoming a popular career choice for young men and women as more and more tourism operators are investing in hospitality training and the industry has developed professional standards and certification for tourism occupations.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members join with me in congratulating these young people and the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kid's Poster Contest

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Winter activities and hot chocolate are synonymous with Saskatchewan winters. Recently Kelsey Statchuk, a grade 5 student at Wadena Elementary, was selected as the Saskatchewan winner of Every Kid's Capital Winter Poster contest.

Kelsey's picture is about her family coming home from an evening walk. They were cold and her dad made a fire, and they made hot chocolate and sang songs as they warmed up. The scene in Kelsey's picture shows the family in the middle of a song, drinking hot chocolate.

Kelsey's picture, along with the other winning entries from Canada, were displayed in the Children's Museum of the Canadian Museum of Civilization through the month of February. Another exhibit, which includes pictures of the winning students and their classes, were displayed along the Rideau Canal in Ottawa for the duration of Winterlude skating period. Kelsey's description of her picture and her favourite winter activities will also be displayed.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask this Assembly to join with me and congratulate Kelsey on her depiction of a scene of Saskatchewan that everyone can relate to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debden Credit Union

Mr. Johnson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Credit unions have served Saskatchewan people well over the years. I'm proud to have served on the board of the Spiritwood Credit Union for over 20 years. But technological change and globalization are changing the credit unions and credit unions are adapting to the changing times.

I'm proud to report that one credit union is doing just that. The Debden Credit Union in the Shellbrook-Spiritwood constituency opened a new branch in Big River on December 18, 1996. This is a particularly noteworthy development because Big River is a larger community than Debden — a sign of the Debden Credit Union's aggressive move into the larger world.

As a second, much bigger step, the Debden Credit Union has entered into a linkage partnership with ORO, an integrated cooperative in the Philippines. These two financial cooperatives are learning how their counterpart operates in a very different part of the world. Last winter, Jim Zimmerman and Neil Jean represented the Debden Credit Union on a trip to the Philippines. Last summer, representatives of ORO visited Debden and even went on a northern fishing trip.

Mr. Speaker, the Debden Credit Union is a local, democratic financial service with a global vision — a true Saskatchewan success story which we should all be proud of.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New SaskTel Facility Opens in North Battleford

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to congratulate SaskTel on the opening of a new \$1.4 million facility in downtown North Battleford. And we were pleased to welcome, we were pleased to welcome the minister on the occasion of the official opening.

We were also pleased, about the same time, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member for North Battleford is having difficulty presenting his member's statement because of the comments of other members in the House. And I'll ask all hon. members to allow the hon. member for North Battleford to speak uninterrupted.

Mr. Hillson: — We were very pleased in North Battleford not only for the new facility, but also to be told about the same time that plans to consolidate customer call centres in Saskatoon have been cancelled and that service will remain with us.

Mr. Speaker, the commitment SaskTel has shown to communities such as my own has convinced me to stay with SaskTel, and I'm pleased to give that commitment today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Transition-to-Work Programs

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to speak about Saskatchewan's world-class education system. In honour of Education Week, I would like to comment on the implementation of the transition-to-work program and their success in the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency.

The transition-to-work programs are designed and implemented to provide hands-on training, develop a healthy work ethic, and often combine high school and post-secondary credits that can count toward journey-person status.

Mr. Speaker, these programs help keep students in school and expand their educational and employment opportunities. They benefit both the individuals and the communities.

An example of the success of the program is evident at the McLurg High School in Wilkie. Students studying television communication technology provided coverage of the Minister of Education's visit to the community. The coverage, Mr. Speaker, was part of their studies and involvement with the cable television station.

Mr. Speaker, students involved in transition-to-work programs are gaining practical and relevant skills in their area of interest as part of Saskatchewan's core curriculum. We must continue to work together with community members and our partners in education, business, and labour to provide students with practical training and specialized learning resources. Successful programs like those in Unity and Wilkie meet the needs of the local community and make the best use of existing resources.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to quality and excellence in education. By investing in our young people, we are investing in our future . . .

The Speaker: — Order, the hon. member's time has expired.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child Prostitution

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are becoming increasingly reminded about the growing problem of child prostitution and the pedophiles who pray on these children.

On an almost daily basis, we are hearing heart-wrenching stories about our young people who have fallen victim to this ever-growing epidemic. People in north-central Regina are witnessing children, some as young as 9 and 10 years old, being prayed upon for sex.

Mr. Speaker, on four separate occasions during the last session I questioned this government about the issue, and I was told that they were looking very carefully at the problem. Well after looking very carefully for one year, will the Minister of Social Services indicate what concrete measures his government has taken to combat this problem?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for raising this issue in the legislature. I congratulate her for her commitment to bringing this issue to public attention. As well, I want to commend those within this community and other communities in our province who are struggling and working hard to find solutions to this very tragic circumstance.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say this. We're not essentially here dealing with child prostitution, we're dealing with child victims, with child victims of adult perpetrators. And, Mr. Speaker, we're here talking about child abuse.

As we struggle to assist the children who find themselves on our streets, and struggle to assist their families, I think equally this legislature and every citizen in the province must stand and say we have zero tolerance for adult perpetrators of child abuse on our streets. And we need to find every legal remedy we can to deal with these individuals.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As politicians we must take action to protect our youth. The people of Saskatchewan are questioning where the action is for these children in this government's child action plan. We cannot continue to talk the talk and do little else. It is for this reason, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to serve notice of my intention to introduce the measures to combat child prostitution Act in this House today.

This Bill would, among other things, seek to identify prostitutes under the age of 18 as victims of child abuse and the men who prey on them as sexual abusers. Mr. Speaker, people who prey on our children should be forced to face tougher laws, and for those who ignore the warnings harsh penalties must be the result.

Will the minister indicate whether he is prepared to take a step forward and support this private members' Bill?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, we've been reviewing very carefully some of the suggestions that have come from the province of Alberta very recently. And I will want to have a look at the Bill that the member is going to put before the House. We haven't seen it, but we'll want to certainly be looking at that.

I think her comments and mine, and I'm sure the comments that would reflect the feeling of every member in this House today, that there is a unanimity around these issues and we need to find solutions, both for the children whose lives are on the street and who are being sexually abused by adult perpetrators, and those legal remedies that can get the johns off the streets.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Funding

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have some very grave concerns about our province's finances and our education system since they appear to be in the hands of a government that can't do the math.

Last week the Finance minister said in this House, and I quote, "In fact K to 12 is getting more funding, not less . . ." Mr. Speaker, that simply is not true. In 1991 the grant for the kindergarten to grade 12 system was \$381 million. The operating grant for 1996-97 was \$355 million. You do the math, Madam Minister, because I have, and any way you crunch the numbers the end result is still the same. Funding has dropped \$26 million, Mr. Speaker; 26 million. Figures don't lie, because boards of education are coping with less.

How has the Finance minister figured that funding has increased for the K to 12 system when the figures don't support her claims?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for that question. My comments are comparing this year to what was received by school boards last year. As I recall the numbers in 1996-97, they will be getting \$2 million more than the previous year. And in 1997-98 they will be getting, I think it's \$900,000 on top of the 2 million.

And I think the important point is to put this into perspective. This is at a time when we are losing millions and millions and hundreds of millions of dollars in transfer payments from the federal government. So our capacity to continue funding agencies is restricted by the amount of dollars that we're losing to their cousins in Ottawa.

So I stand by the statement that although last year, Mr. Speaker, we cut ourselves — this government cut itself by \$50 million, lost 600 positions — we were able to provide more money to

the K to 12 system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, in fact in 1995-96 the numbers that were given to school boards in this province, the grant totalled \$355.354 million. This last year the grant is \$355.154 million.

Underfunding is a serious problem in the education system. For example, the Regina Public School Board is closing six schools and now it doesn't know if it will receive any more money for its transportation budget, a budget that is sure to feel the strain because more kids will be bussed in this city.

Boards right across the province are coping with \$8 million in wage hikes to teachers' salaries, and the government has made it clear it will only be picking up \$900,000 of that cost. All stakeholders in the province — the teachers, the trustees, the parents, and the students — are looking to this government for a comprehensive plan. When will this government make education a priority, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Just for the purposes of clarification, Mr. Speaker, I just want to assure the members that the Regina school division will be eligible for the urban transportation policy, as all other urban boards are in the province. So I just wanted to clarify that for the Regina school board's edification, as well as the Liberal leader's edification.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of educational funding, we have made it very clear in the last two months that there are five areas, strategic areas, that it's our intention to invest in. We've said that the priorities of this government are jobs, education, health care, social programs, and highways.

Mr. Speaker, on March 20, 1997, at approximately this time, the Minister of Finance will stand in her place and deliver the province's budget. I would advise the members that they should stay tuned, be here, and it will become transparent — the intentions of this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

First Nations Taxation

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance claims that collecting taxes for on-reserve businesses is no different than collecting taxes from any corner store, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations claims that first nations lands and persons are tax exempt.

Mr. Speaker, this issue is poisoning community relations in Saskatchewan and must be resolved quickly and harmoniously. It cannot be resolved by threats and raves. Nor can it be resolved by negotiation as long as the parties have such a vastly different understanding of their respective rights and obligations. The only thing that will resolve it is a constitutional reference to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal in order to determine the tax obligations of first nations people. Only then

will negotiations be able to go forward.

My question of the Hon. Minister of Justice: will he recommend to cabinet that a constitutional reference be made to our Court of Appeal to determine this difficult issue?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I can answer on behalf of the government with respect to this question and tell the hon. member that our preferred route in matters of this nature and in most matters of public policy is that they be decided through the give and take, the compromise, the discussion of a political process done in good spirit by all the parties affected.

As well-intentioned and as capable as the judiciary may be, very often in issues which comprise more than legal considerations, this being one of them, the judiciary may not be very well the most favoured or best suited a place in which to make this decision final.

It's really democracy and it's really a question of compromise and discussion, and that's our approach.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Premier. However, I think we all recognize that negotiations only move forward in any context when the respective parties have a similar understanding of their rights and obligations. Here, that understanding is simply not present.

The government has tried threats; they have tried negotiations, which have gone nowhere. The third party is prepared to try and throw gasoline on this difficult issue. I am saying that until we have a constitutional reference as a framework for negotiations, negotiations are unlikely to go anywhere.

Will the Premier commit to have that constitutional reference as a prelude to negotiations, which will then accomplish something?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I would not say, although I must confess that it's run across my mind, that the nature of the questions that the hon. member has advanced here, I would not say that they constitute throwing gasoline on the situation. But the thought certainly does run across my mind and I'm sure a lot of people.

Listen to the logic of the Liberal Party: go to court, frame a constitutional reference, and negotiate. He knows full well what the situation is if you go to court and have a constitutional reference. All the parties say, let's just wait until the court decides on this issue; what's the sense of talking and what's the sense of compromising, or what's the sense of negotiating? You cannot say, logically, go to court and then carry out the discussions at the same time. That will freeze-frame the discussions. That will freeze-frame the topic that needs to be resolved and determined by give and take.

Now I say to the hon. member opposite here that if he wants to be helpful and constructive in this very important social, economic, legal, political, constitutional discussion, what he ought to be doing is not asking these kinds of questions but advocating and helping us in the resolution through a fair, compromised approach — not through some form of legal alternatives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Compensation for Parents Affected by Labour Standards

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Labour. Mr. Minister, many families in Saskatchewan, like Leisa and Kevin Fedak, and David and Donna Blackhurst, who I think are in the Speaker's gallery today, were left with big, retroactive babysitting bills as a result of your government's ill-conceived amendments to The Labour Standards Act.

Mr. Minister, in January you admitted that your government made a mistake by classifying parents who bring care-givers into their home as employers. You also admitted that your government made a big mistake by not informing parents of these changes in 1995 — a small step in the right direction.

But, Mr. Minister, you left Saskatchewan families to pay for your mistake. You met with some of these parents and gave them . . . and they gave you, rather, two weeks to answer several questions that they posed to you. Your two weeks ran out yesterday, Mr. Minister.

So, Mr. Minister, why haven't you answered their questions? Why do you believe that these people do not deserve an answer? And is it fair that families are on the hook for the government's mistakes? Do you believe that this is right, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well essentially the member's question was answered in this House by me about 10 days ago, when I told the minister, as I have said publicly, as the Premier has said publicly, we're going to monitor this situation. We're going to keep track of how many claims there are and what the settlements are.

Those settlements are being facilitated by the Department of Labour, and when we have the information available to us as to just what's involved here — what are the factors involved, how much money is involved — then we'll make a decision as to whether or not anything further will be done.

Now that was made clear some time ago. Now if I'm not right up to date with my correspondence, I apologize for that. But I'll look into that and ensure that the people you refer to have an answer to their inquiry.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank you, Minister. Thank you also for the promotion; I hope the pay cheque reflects that.

Mr. Minister, Alison Watson, one of the parents who received a big bill because of your mistake, recently wrote to the Premier about this issue. And she of course, about 10 minutes before this House sat today, was contacted and had received no information from you at all on the answers to these questions.

Her letter states:

The money that these parents have paid or will have to pay, is money that will be taken away from the children . . . Most parents spend extra money in the household on their children. You are therefore taking money away from children.

Mr. Minister, is this the reputation that you want? A heartless government that is hurting families, that is taking money away from children?

Mr. Minister, I am introducing a Bill which will give you the opportunity to do the right thing. Mr. Minister, will you support our Bill? Will you compensate the families your government has taken money away from?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the same question and I don't know how many times I have to give the answer, but let me give it again.

We're going to monitor this situation to see what kind of dimensions it has: how much money is involved; what the settlements are; how many of them there are; what kind of a claim would . . . what kind of a program would be required in order to meet this situation that the member describes.

Now we're going to do that, and we're going to make a decision in due course. That's the nature of government. We can't make decisions until we get information. That's fundamental, and the member will know that.

Now when the information is at hand, when we've got the information we need, then the decisions will be made, and then an announcement will be made. That's the way things work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gaming Addictions

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Mr. Minister, the number of people being treated for gambling addiction has nearly doubled in the past two years, from 221 in '94-95, to 426 in the following year, and now 456 in the first 10 months of this particular year. Much of the cost of this treatment is being provided by district health boards, and we'd like to know how much this is costing health boards and the province. Unfortunately your government doesn't keep those figures. That's an astounding admission for a government that says it's concerned about the social costs of the problem of gambling.

Mr. Minister, why aren't you keeping these figures, and will you commit to finding out how much gambling addiction is costing the district health boards?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the member should be aware that in our province we've moved from a system of per diem or per-patient day funding for services to a global system of population health funding to health districts. What we do by and large, with some adjustments, is divide the health budget that goes to health districts between them on the basis of their populations. We then ask that they provide certain services to the people of the province including drug and alcohol counselling, gambling counselling, and so on.

And I'm pleased to tell the member and the House that we do more than other provinces in the area of gambling addiction, and we're providing more services in that regard than have ever been available before, Mr. Speaker. And the same is true for drug and alcohol addiction counselling. It's unfortunate that we have these problems in our society but we do, and we're dealing with them, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Closure of Working for Women

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Saskatoon's Working for Women is an organization that has successfully worked with women in poverty. For over 16 years, it has helped them to gain the skills necessary for employment and training. Without the provincial government's immediate intervention, the doors of Working for Women will close this Thursday.

My question is for the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training. Mr. Minister, why is your government so narrowly interpreting its role in the Employment Insurance Act when other provincial governments faced with exactly the same decision at the federal level have chosen to keep similar organizations fully functioning, and in some cases, has actually increased funding to these organizations?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Chairman — or Mr. Speaker, this question of formerly federally funded organizations who are now in a crisis situation is all too familiar and is a source of great frustration to us. This is not the only organization that is in a crisis because of the withdrawal of the federal funding for organizations that they have funded, in this case up to 16 years.

Now I'm not sure what other provinces the member is referring to, but this is a problem for all of us right across Canada and we're at a loss to know what to do with it. There is no way that we're in a financial position to back-fill behind all of these federal cuts. These are organizations that they have encouraged, have established, and nourished over the years and now they simply just walk away from them. And it's hard for us to be able to back-fill behind that because the amounts involved are considerable.

Now we have been meeting with the federal government and I have written to the minister and we're trying to get them to hang on and continue the funding until we can work something out.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government repeatedly states its commitment to not only combating poverty but its commitment to increasing employment. And the women in this organization, the women in poverty served by this organization, do not feel that the government's actions supports its words.

These are amongst the most vulnerable people in our province, Mr. Minister, and you know that. The installation of human resource development computers in malls does absolutely nothing for women such as these who have no computer skills. And we may have 10 different counsellors in Saskatoon who are at the employment assistance office, but they're booked for months and months in advance to deal with just simply Employment Insurance clients alone.

Now, Mr. Minister, this is now your responsibility. It has been given your government — the responsibility to be in charge of the administration of the distribution of these funds, so it's your choice, sir. What about the 60 per cent of people not on Employment Insurance, not on SAP (Saskatchewan Assistance Plan) — what about those people who are not employed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I don't know what funds the member is talking about. The federal government hasn't given us any funds with which to continue to sponsor or to support the organizations that they established and they nourished over all these years.

And this is an especially frustrating problem for us, Mr. Speaker, because these cut-backs, these withdrawals by the federal government, happened at a time when the employment insurance fund is in a surplus which is almost obscene. It exceeds \$5 billion.

So the money is there. It's in accounts in Ottawa. And I would urge the member, as well as the members of the other Liberal Party, to write to the Prime Minister and write to Mr. Pettigrew and tell them to continue funding these organizations, at least until there can be a decent level of federal-provincial negotiation to talk about how these programs can be continued in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I would never question your understanding of the important issues facing women. I do not question that at all. I do question, however, your commitment and your government's understanding, whether or not you have any clue at all about what this is going to mean on Thursday when the doors of Working for Women closes.

Mr. Minister, this question is for your government, not someone anywhere else but for your government. How are you going to provide services to the 80 per cent of women, the 80 per cent of women who currently live in poverty and currently are receiving help from this organization when not one of them qualifies for employment assistance services or reach-back services, given that they will be excluded because of your narrow interpretation?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I quarrel with the member's characterization of our position on this thing. We are not taking a narrow interpretation or anything like that. We're faced with a situation where we've had massive withdrawal of federal funds from the training system at every level. And one of the levels at which there has been massive withdrawals are support for organizations like Working for Women.

We've never made any financial contribution to that organization at all. We've co-operated with it; we have worked with it; we've met with it, but we've taken no part in the funding. And it doesn't automatically follow that all of that becomes a provincial responsibility just because the federal government is so irresponsible as to withdraw, precipitously, from the support of that kind of a program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, there are indeed organizations like this throughout the nation. They have been faced with identical kinds of challenges that you state that your government is facing because of federal cut-backs. Why is it, sir, that groups like Working for Women, who work across this country with their sister organizations, have been able to state unequivocally that it is this government in the province of Saskatchewan that has chosen not to see this as a priority; that in Winnipeg they in fact have received increases — increases — to the funding of their organization.

In Toronto they are receiving increases to the funding of their organization. Somehow this doesn't mesh, Mr. Minister. Somehow in the province of Saskatchewan your government has not seen fit to see that Working for Women is a viable organization providing a service that other organizations do not.

Will you or will you not please take a stand on this and not simply pass the buck by blaming someone else?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — I am not passing the buck, Mr. Speaker, and I think the member will know that. It's not a question of passing the buck; it's a question here of who created the problem.

Now I'm going to take the member at her word and on the basis of that make inquiries of other provinces as to just what has happened there. I'm not aware that what she has said is a fact, but I'm going to make inquiries into that.

But let me just remind the House, Mr. Speaker, that the extent

of the federal withdrawal from the training system in this province may be as much as \$48 million. Now my friends opposite in the official opposition don't like to do it because they don't like to have to sit in this House and answer for the federal actions. Our experience though is that a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal. And that is the reality and these people have to account for the actions of their federal cousins in this situation and in many others.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, order. All hon. members will come to order. Order. Question period has ended and so has answer period. Order, order. Answers will cease from both sides of the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 209 — The Measures to Combat Child Prostitution Act

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 209, The Measures to Combat Child Prostitution Act, 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. 208 — The Employers of Babysitters Restitution Act

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that The Employers of Babysitters Restitution Act be now read and introduced for 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. 20 — The Small Claims Act, 1997 Loi de 1997 sur les petites créances

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move Bill No. 20, The Small Claims 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. 21 — The Condominium Property Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 21, The Condominium Property 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. 22 — The Justices of the Peace Amendment Act, 1997 Loi de 1997 modifiant la Loi sur les juges de paix

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 22, The Justices of the Peace 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. 23 — The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act Loi sur l'exécution des jugements canadiens

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 23, The Enforcement of Canadian Judgments Act 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. 24 — The Court Jurisdiction and Proceedings Transfer Act Loi sur la compétence des tribunaux et le renvoi des instances

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 24, The Court Jurisdiction and Proceedings Transfer Act 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.

(1430)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that questions 11 through to 15 be converted to notices of motion for return.

The Speaker: — Leave will be required. Is the whip requesting leave to do those simultaneously?

Mr. Kowalsky: — I so request, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The whip has requested leave to deal with items 1 through 5 simultaneously. Is leave granted?

Leave is granted. Items 1 through 5 are converted to motions for return (debatable).

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I hereby table the response to question no. 16 in the spirit of open and honest government.

The Speaker: — Item no. 6 is tabled.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of open and honest government, I hereby table the response to question no. . . . item no. 17.

The Speaker: — The question is tabled.

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.

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I perhaps should begin, Mr. Speaker, by assuring members opposite that the length of the comments will not match the size of this podium. I had in mind something a trace more modest when I asked for a podium.

Last night I congratulated the mover and the seconder on the honour of being chosen to move and second the reply to the throne speech and on what were two very fine speeches. The mover was someone who someone said was . . . just seemed like yesterday was a neophyte; now is quite an accomplished speaker. The seconder who is . . . as is always the case, was thoughtful and reflective in her comments.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, before getting into the main text of my comments, deal with a subject that has concerned me for some time actually. I raised it privately with one or two of the opposition members. I recognize, Mr. Speaker, your ruling on the subject. I accept your ruling on the subject of the use of the opposition research funds. I want to comment on this, Mr. Speaker. You've ruled on it. I accept that. It is a proper interpretation of the rules.

I do want to say, however, that merely because something is not prohibited by law does not mean it is appropriate. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that under our system of law, which applies in the legislature as well as out, if something is not prohibited and it's allowed, that doesn't mean it's appropriate and it doesn't mean it should be done.

Let me pick a very simple example for members opposite. If you were to ask any policeman whether or not it's illegal to talk in a boisterous way in church, he'd say, of course not. It would seem equally obvious it's something that shouldn't be done.

I recognize that the leader did consult with respect to the rules. It strikes me, however, this is an inappropriate use of research funds.

An Hon. Member: — Are you talking about the Liberal leader?

Hon. Mr. Shillington: — I am talking about the use of the opposition research funds.

Everyone — everyone — Mr. Speaker, is I think reasonably familiar with this person's . . . his capabilities. Whatever they are, he doesn't have a background as a research officer. Moreover, if he were trained as a research person, it would be a bizarre use of a party leader's time, to have them doing research. And no one believes, I think, Mr. Speaker, no one believes that's what's being done.

Mr. Speaker, these funds were voted by this legislature to hire

staff who would assist them in the work in the House. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, from what I've seen so far, they could use a little of that help. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, things like the \$4-a-day living allowance on which they agreed to live only to find out that, on average, Saskatchewan people spend less than that is an example of what research people might do for you.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a violation of the letter of the law, but is certainly a violation of the spirit of what these funds were voted for. It's a violation of the ordinary precepts of common morality.

I think the same can be said, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Liberal seat sale in the gallery. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it's not illegal to promise the seats to contributors, but I ask members opposite to ask themselves whether or not that's an appropriate use of this privilege.

Mr. Speaker, since time immemorial, opposition parties have been given some tickets because there are groups which relate to opposition parties which might not make their way onto the government invitation list. That's been done since time immemorial. I know of no instance in the past where these have been proffered up as an inducement to people to make contributions to the party.

Well I have a couple of questions, Mr. Speaker, for members opposite. One of the questions I have for members opposite is, does anyone over there know the difference between right and wrong?

Mr. Speaker, I had occasion to ask that . . . Well before the PCs (Progressive Conservative) respond to that, let me just say that I had occasion during the years in opposition to ask that of the Devine government. I had many occasions to wonder, does anyone in that government know the difference between right and wrong.

I want to say with respect to the third party, to be fair, I think they have tried, made some effort, to put that period behind them, to separate themselves from that period. They have tried to operate by a different morality. But, Mr. Speaker, it appears the Liberals pick up where the Tories left off. It appears the Liberals pick up where the Tories left off.

I have another question, Mr. Speaker, for the Liberals, and a question which the Saskatchewan public are going to be asking themselves: do you really think you're ready to assume office when you make this quality of decision? You folks have a relatively small budget and it is highly scrutinized. I think, and I will say this to you in public, I think that you've misused that money.

What's going to happen if you should ever get to this side of the House, have the enormous resources that are available to a government, which are much larger and which are not anywhere near as closely scrutinized?

If this is how you handle one talent, are you really ready to handle 5 talents? I ask the members opposite, do you know the difference between right and wrong? And if there's any serious doubt on that issue, do you really think you're ready to assume

the reins of office? The answer to both questions, Mr. Speaker, must be no.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a couple of comments in addition to that, and I've been asked by the whip to keep my comments short. As I'm fond of reminding other people, the Gettysburg Address took less than five minutes and I don't . . . So those sort of thoughts can be expressed in five minutes — perhaps I could do mine in 10 to 15 or so.

I want to make a comment, Mr. Speaker, first of all about competition and the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) agreement. We are in the midst, Mr. Speaker, of pursuing an Agreement on Internal Trade; to some extent, reflects of some the benefits and also some of the problems that we find in the Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement.

There is, Mr. Speaker, both good and ill in the North American Free Trade Agreement. First of all, I want to deal with those things which are negative. I and my colleagues have stated that with respect to the NAFTA Free Trade Agreement, the overwhelming problem is it is solely an economic agreement. There is nothing about this agreement which recognizes the social policies which form a part of this country.

One might contrast this with the principles upon which the European Economic Community was founded. They began with a statement of the social principles to which European . . . the western European nations could agree. Around that, they built an economic agreement, but the economic agreement is subject to the social principles.

None of that was done here. What we have is an economic agreement, and what we tend to see, Mr. Speaker, is what has been described by many of . . . some of my colleagues as a race to the bottom. Cheaper labour, less . . . fewer rights for labour, anything that's cheaper; it's part of your production — dismantlement of social programs — it's part of your production, and it's a race to the bottom.

What this agreement really needed — it may be late for the Free Trade Agreement — but what this really needed was a statement of social principles upon . . . which defines this country. We Canadians define ourselves as different than Americans. When you ask a Canadian what's different, the conversation gets pretty quickly to the social programs which are so important to Canadians.

What was lacking in the Free Trade Agreement was a statement of those social principles incorporated into the agreement, about which then the economic agreement might have been framed. None of that was done.

It is not too late, Mr. Speaker, to incorporate us . . . to incorporate — perhaps it's not too late — to incorporate some of those principles into the Agreement on Internal Trade. And I and my colleagues are pursuing that.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the . . . I don't want to be misinterpreted. There are some things about the Free Trade Agreement which are not all bad. There is no question that the

volume of trade has increased very, very substantially. The figures simply cannot be denied.

Since the Free Trade Agreement was implemented in 1988, our trade with the U.S. (United States) has increased by 97 per cent. When you consider that our trade with the U.S. totals \$3.8 billion, that is an enormous increase — all out of proportion to anything which we have historically seen, and certainly all out of proportion to any inflationary figures.

And by way of comparison, our trade with our next four largest partners is less than half of what our trade with the U.S. now is. There's no question it has been successful economically. But we Canadians have never defined ourselves solely in economic terms, as some peoples around the globe have. We have always defined ourselves as well in social terms, and it's lacking in this agreement.

Again I do not want to be misunderstood. To comment on the Free Trade Agreement is not to accuse free trade. There's no question, in Saskatchewan free trade is essential to the standard of living we enjoy. No question at all.

Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan we have the highest percentage of our gross domestic product comes from external trade than any jurisdiction in Canada. And Canada is one of the great trading nations on earth.

It's true in Saskatchewan, if you think about it. Where are the good jobs, the jobs that pay — let's pick a figure out of the air — more than 12, \$13 an hour? There's two sources, two large sources. One is the public service in its broadest sense — provincial, federal, municipal, school, hospital. Beyond that, almost all the other good jobs that pay well, almost all of them, depend upon export trade. Almost all of them. There are very few in Saskatchewan that don't.

Our standard of living depends upon trade, it depends upon us being successful in trading. And we are. All of that is not to give a blanket approval to any trade agreements.

I want to also make a comment, Mr. Speaker, about the issue of national unity. It's an area which we tend to . . . it's an area where fools rush in and angels fear to tread, I guess. I do want to make a comment or two about it.

The events of last October proved that Canadians — or rather, October '95, — proved that Canadians do care about this country. Old and young, rich and poor, urban and rural — vast numbers went to Montreal in the dying days of the referendum. It may well have made the difference, as slim as it was.

Last year, during the spectacular and devastating floods in the Saguenay Valley, Canadians once again contributed very generously to a region, without asking whether that region was federalist or sovereigntist. In fact I gather it has a history of voting for sovereigntist candidates.

Canadians across this country do care, and care a great deal. And it is in part that devotion to this country which makes Canadians want to pitch in and be a part of it and be a part of a solution.

(1445)

We see the challenges in two respects. Firstly, on the legal and constitutional front. We must begin, I suppose, by asking ourselves what Quebec people really want. What they really want is not so outrageous when you analyse it. What they want is to be assured that within Confederation, their language and culture will be secure.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, it's not always been the case. When Quebec people claim to be an oppressed people, there's some historical foundation upon which that can be based. There was a period in Quebec in which you couldn't use French if you wanted a good job. You couldn't even use French in a good restaurant.

I remember being in a restaurant in Montreal in 1963 with a lady from the Caribbean whose first language was French. We went into a restaurant. She tried to order in French. I remember the waitress snapping at her, speak English. I remember her saying to me, you Canadians, is it any wonder the Quiet Revolution's beginning. I can remember her saying to me, you Canadians, is it any wonder that you have a problem when you can't order a meal in a good restaurant in the heart of Quebec. There's no question, at a point of time, there's some foundation for that claim.

It's equally apparent that we have made enormous strides in eliminating that. But the claim of Quebec people to have their language and their culture guaranteed within the legal framework of Canada is not an unreasonable one.

The difficulty of course, is finding an agreement which everyone agrees upon. We in this province and in other provinces have sought to find that middle ground; to find, as the Premier of this province has so eloquently put it, to find a package which we can set in the window which will be available to them the next time they should go to the polls or the next time they should have a referendum. And we'll continue to work for that.

At the same time, we're attempting to do something else. We are attempting to revamp Canada's social safety network. We're attempting to make it more effective and more efficient and less costly. We have had . . . largely through the work of this government, we have had established, at the level of the premiers, a council on social policy reform. Out of that council and out of the work of the ministers, came the national child benefit plan.

Mr. Speaker, it is true that without the energetic and very able promotion by the Premier of this province, all of that would not have happened. It is equally fair—and I'm sorry that he's not going to hear these comments personally—it's equally true that the member from Regina Dewdney and his very considerable diplomatic skills played a major role in steering through into the initial stages, the whole policy on social policy reform. He played a major role in it and I wanted to pay tribute to him.

We have today, we have today, Mr. Speaker, the national child

benefit program. We have a series of principles upon which the social policy on a federal level can be based, and there are officials and ministers meeting to further define this. We have gone a long way, Mr. Speaker, towards redefining a social policy which as Canadians defines us.

Throughout the history of this country, Mr. Speaker, this province has played a role in this country all out of proportion to its size and all out of proportion to its economic importance.

It's true in the days of Tommy Douglas, it's true in the days of Allan Blakeney, and it is true today, this Premier we have in office now. We have played a role all out of proportion to our size. We were the instigators and the major definers of the social policy.

Someone has brought to my attention a column which appeared last Saturday in the *Regina Free Press* written by a well-known Saskatchewan journalist, Paul Martin, who is certainly not a New Democrat or a Liberal or anything else, he's simply a professional journalist. But the title of the article—I won't read it all—the title of the article is "Saskatchewan is soul of Canada."

And then he goes on to say:

That bold statement fell from the lips of one of the country's most well-known business figures and writers Dian Cohen in an address to the inaugural membership meeting of STEP, the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership.

The comment reflected her view that Saskatchewan, particularly in political terms, has often been a national leader whether it was, in her words, in once-innovative thinking on the development of a welfare state or on fiscal prudence.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker—and I've made generous use of the 10 minutes which was made available to me—I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am proud to be part of a government which has been as effective as it has been in the role of intergovernmental affairs. This has been a very interesting time and a place to be of government, and this is a very good government to be a part of and I'm proud to do that.

It goes without saying that I will, with considerable pride, support the motion in reply to the throne speech.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika:—Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise in response to the government's throne speech. It's only the second time that I've had such an honour as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to speak for my constituents in Melville.

Before I get into the main portion of my speech today, Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the appreciation that's gone before with respect to everyone who so tirelessly work behind the scenes here at the legislature and the constituency offices, who help us do our jobs as MLAs—from everyone in the Clerk's office to

the capable library staff to our hard-working pages, and everyone else who makes it possible for us to come here each year to do our jobs on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. And it's already been said before that families are a great mainstay and supporters for each and every one of us. And to Barb and Kim, my wife and my daughter, they have been exactly that over my first tenure in office.

I also want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, once again, for presiding over us in such an able and fair manner. As well I want to thank you, sir, for your hard work outside of session this past year. Your effort to take the time to visit students in many, many schools around Saskatchewan is to be commended. I know for a fact how much the students at White Calf Collegiate in Lebret enjoyed your visit, hearing about how government works, or is supposed to work. And of course, they'll cherish the opportunity of trying on the Speaker's pirate hat. Sir, if you'll allow me, you truly emulate the respect and dignity of this venerable institution that all members of the House should aspire to.

Mr. Speaker, my response today will be directed at a great many issues that face this great province of ours. And because I have the honour of closing off this debate for my caucus, I'll not speak at length since my colleagues have already stated our view of the speech. Unlike the members opposite, I don't feel it's necessary to talk just for the sake of talking. It's really more important to say something meaningful while you're talking — something some of the members opposite clearly do not believe.

And unlike many of the members opposite, I shall not lower myself to call into question the integrity of anyone in this House. I was taken aback the other day in particular when I heard one of the members opposite alluding to questionable motives of other hon. members relative to political beliefs.

It's my feeling, Mr. Speaker, that no matter how much we disagree with one another on either side of the House, we should not be calling into question the integrity of any member simply because we may disagree from time to time. Everyone was sent here by the people of their constituencies, and that should be respected always, Mr. Speaker. And I truly respect the honour that the constituents of Melville have bestowed upon me to represent them, and I would never want to let them down.

I would hope none of us are here for self-serving purposes. Perhaps some of the members opposite are, and that's why they lash out with meaningless attacks on other members for the simple fact that they dare disagree with them. That's becoming an all too common theme with many of the members on the government benches, Mr. Speaker, and not just in this House.

It seems that anyone who has the audacity to stand up to this government and say hey, we don't like what you're doing, please listen to us and maybe we can help you improve it, are treated with unabashed disdain by the members of that party. They talk about frogs and chickens and all those funny little stories from Dr. Seuss.

Mr. Speaker, I believe one of the major reasons governments

are defeated is an over-abundance of arrogance and a dearth of humility. That was true in 1982 when the current Premier and most of the members of that NDP government were fired by the voters. And it was most certainly true during most of the '80s when the Tory government of Grant Devine stopped listening to the people and were punished mightily for it. I see the same signs today, Mr. Speaker. This is a government that has stopped listening.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me I spoke many of these same words in the lead-up to the last session of this House. And I spoke many of these same words during the last session and afterwards. And what did we see during the last year? We saw that government try to ram through municipal amalgamation without first asking the municipalities what they thought about it. And the government was forced to back down. Although, listening to His Honour's prorogation speech, it seemed the members opposite had blocked this little fact out of their memories.

We saw this government continuing to deny reality and the fact that its policies have left huge holes in our health care system. This party which so vigorously holds medicare to its breast as its own child has in fact now denied responsibility for the child. And because of this abandonment, Mr. Speaker, there are many places in our province where people are worried and they are scared. They are scared that they no longer have access to adequate levels of medicare.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Time and time again during the last session, we stood in this House and brought to the attention of the members opposite, the severe shortages that have been appearing in our health care system. There are people waiting weeks and weeks for very critical results for tests of serious illnesses, but there's a wait and wait, because we do not have adequate funding for those technicians and the people to carry out those tests.

Time and time again we heard this government deny responsibility for the system it tells us it was put here on earth to protect. Time and time again we heard the Minister of Health stand in this House and shrug his shoulders, downplaying the ill effects his government's policies are having on the people of this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's much easier for the minister to play politics and play the blame game when it comes to medical care in this province. That's been his strategy since becoming minister. He refused to listen last year, and it was not until the people of this province literally took to the streets, that he acknowledged there was even a problem. I remember last summer in Melville when literally hundreds of people were marching in protest of this government's policies, and the same marches occurred throughout the province.

Suddenly the same minister who was telling us for the better part of a year there wasn't a health care funding crisis, found \$40 million to quell the protests. That was money we were constantly told was not there. We were told the government simply couldn't afford to inject money in a much needed system.

But then what happened? Well let's see now. Mr. Anguish, as we know, ended his distinguished political career and resigned his seat in the legislature. With a by-election coming and people marching against this government, suddenly the money was there. Never in my life, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have I seen such cynical action. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've seen many such actions since returning to this province in 1981.

The Devine Tories ran their whole government using such strategies. Politics, not good governance, ruled the days in the 1980s. So what's changed? As far as I can tell, absolutely nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Absolutely nothing.

If it hadn't been for the North Battleford by-election, do you believe for a minute there would have been extra money for health care last year? Of course there wouldn't have been.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, listening to the throne speech, I was saddened. Oh yes, there was much talk of renewed hope in Saskatchewan. The government has taken to patting itself on the back non-stop for anything good that happens here.

(1500)

But in my constituency of Melville, and in many of the other constituencies I had the honour to visit in the last year as interim leader of my party, I saw little evidence of hope the government speaks of. Almost every week now in my own constituency there seems to be another slap in the face by the government who has seemingly abandoned not only Melville, but any other areas outside of the province, outside of the major cities. Communities outside of our large centres have been treated with nothing short of disrespect and disdain by this government and this Premier. And it hurts me to see this happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If it were not for the hard work and the initiative of the people who live in our smaller villages, towns, and cities, the devastation would be unstoppable.

But these people work very hard and try to succeed despite this government's seeming hatred for rural Saskatchewan. I commend the small-business people that open up their shops and sell their wares to people in those small communities where the government has taken away employment and services for the people that need it, for the people that are the heart of this great province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear the government opposite take credit for the province's balanced budget. But have they ever once stopped to see how they got there? One hundred per cent totally, completely on the backs of the citizens.

Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the government is better off than it was five years ago. But the people? That's another story entirely. But the members opposite sit there in their self-satisfied arrogance and ignore the facts. They ignore the damage that has been inflicted in many parts of our province. Even the members who represent many of those areas ignore this.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they can ignore reality if they want. But there are certain things they can't ignore. They can't ignore

the fact that in the latest poll only 26 per cent of Saskatchewan residents supported what they're doing to our health care system. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they most certainly can't ignore the fact that the member from North Battleford now sits on our side of the House.

Yes, even North Battleford, my home town, is telling this government it is on the wrong track; even North Battleford, which has consistently voted CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) or NDP for the last 50 years has turned its back on this government.

The good people of North Battleford told the government, they told the NDP they weren't credible and they defeated the NDP candidate. They sent a wake-up call to the Premier and to the members opposite that they wanted honest government, trustworthy government, and a caring government. Will the members opposite listen to that message, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I doubt it.

And before I continue, I want to again welcome the new member from North Battleford to the House. It's about time that that part of the province had a member who is willing to speak up for the people who live there. It's a shame that other members, members from that side of the House, aren't allowed to do the same.

However, I'm sure by the time the next election rolls around, the people will have their say. And they'll say goodbye to those members who aren't willing to speak out on their behalf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the past year we've talked a lot about troubles facing health care in Saskatchewan, and these problems remain despite any number of bandages this government has used to try to stop the hemorrhaging. But now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP is casting its wide net of destruction ever farther.

Now our schools are the targets. And it looks so similar to the health care crisis, only in this case the government didn't have to create sham boards to take the blame for this government's actions. This time they were already in place. Now it's the school boards and the school trustees that they blame.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it used to be in this province that schools closed only when there weren't enough students to warrant them. Closures were population driven, and if there were enough children in need of an education in any one area, they had a school. That's no longer the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Many of the schools we see closing today are not lacking students. They don't have just 20 or 30 students. In some cases they have 2 or 300 students. Ten, twenty, or thirty years ago there would have been no question whether these schools were viable. If they had students, they stayed open and teachers were employed and children were educated near their homes. Now in many cases these closures are completely funding driven. The boards don't have the money, so schools are closed regardless of the number of students.

So it's not good enough for the Minister of Education or the Premier or the Deputy Premier to stand in this House and say that nothing's changed. Schools have always closed so how is

this any different, they say.

Well it is different, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are not one-room school houses we're talking about; these are not schools in small towns that have disappeared with time. These are schools in viable centres. These are even schools in Regina, which does not have a shrinking population. These are schools that would remain if only this government had a commitment to keeping them open.

But instead we have a Minister of Finance and a Minister of Education who saw a way to hack a few more dollars out of the system while hoisting responsibility for such closures onto the shoulders of the school boards. Another abdication of responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just as we've seen over and over again with hospitals and health care.

Only this time it's not the sick and the elderly who are being hurt, it's our children, it's the future of our province, who now have to climb on buses every morning to be taken to another town away from their communities in order to receive an education, not unlike our young people who are then finally educated and have to leave to go to other provinces to find employment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the members opposite don't see that something has gone wrong here, I ask them — I beg them — to please open their eyes and to see what's happening in our province.

There's more to governing than a balance sheet. Ralph Klein has balanced his budget too, you know. So if you want to be held in the same class as him, they must keep it up — keep forgetting the people who are affected by government policies. Keep it up and you'll go down as the finest right-wing government our province never had. I just wonder what Tommy would say about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what it really boils down to, what it really boils down to is leadership. I've been on the receiving end of many barbs from the other side when it came to leadership. That's all right. They can take all the shots they want, because that's pure politics. That really doesn't harm anyone.

But what they've done in abdicating their leadership responsibilities is truly sad. It appears to me the members opposite have absolutely no interest in the problems facing Saskatchewan. They appear only interested in who they can blame for those problems.

Well guess what? It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter who ran up the debt. It doesn't matter which politicians are getting how much money from other politicians. It doesn't matter to the people who are hurting out there. What a responsible government would do would be to confront the fundamental problems facing Saskatchewan head-on with determination to truly build a better province.

Yes, no question, debt is one of the problems facing us. But surely the members opposite can see it's not the only one. Yes, Saskatchewan receives less in federal transfers than it once did. But so do nine other provinces and two territories, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Maybe the members opposite should be paying a little

bit of attention to this because we are not the only ones who are receiving a reduction in federal transfer money.

You can't stand up in this House day after day and say somehow that the federal government is picking on Saskatchewan especially hard, because that's not true. And it's not credible. When we see the Premier laughing and smiling with the Prime Minister at every opportunity, suddenly on these occasions all seems very cosy indeed between the two levels of government. So what's the problem?

Other provinces have had to come to terms with these cut-backs, and so must we. Other provinces have had to overcome debt problems, and so must we.

But we have options to help us get past these challenges. It's not good enough simply to close hospitals and schools and raise taxes because you can blame others; that's not what the people elected this government to do. They elected this government to find real solutions, not more excuses to justify lack of action and lack of leadership. I think this government can take a lesson from local leaders of municipal governments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, local governments have borne the brunt of five years of cut-backs from this government — cut-backs that had far more devastating effects than anything the province has received from the federal government. Yet, instead of whining and moaning and throwing up their hands in despair, these local leaders have used initiative. They've used initiative to see their way through their problems. They have shown real leadership, Mr. Speaker, not that this government would ever acknowledge that.

No, instead we hear the members opposite speak of local governments as huge wastes of money. We hear the Premier telling them they have to be creative to get out of their financial troubles. We even heard government members say it's unfair for these local leaders to blame the province. Hypocrisy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sheer hypocrisy. I don't know what's worse: what this government says or the fact that many members over there actually believe what they're saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this throne speech is filled with very nice words. We hear about hope for the future. We hear about this government's commitment to the people. We hear of this government's drive to create wealth in our province. We hear of their commitment to help our poor children. We hear of their commitment to maintain the health care system. We hear of the importance of education.

Yet all these words sound very nice, but we've heard it all before and we still haven't seen any results. So are we to believe they are any more committed to these areas than they have been in the past five years? Are we supposed to believe them now when these same words have rang so hollow since 1991?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have problems with health care. Our education system is targeted. Our justice system in this province is a mess. It has been. We've seen the problems that have been created because a lack of leadership in the Justice department, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's like a problem we have with the Health minister. He gets up in this House and says to the people of Saskatchewan, we've got no problem with health; the health care is just great. Everything's fine. Don't worry about it. We hear the same thing from the Justice minister — crime is not a problem in this province.

Well let me just perhaps enlighten members of this House exactly what is going on in this province. We've heard it all; we've raised the issues. We're begging the government to take note of the fact that there is a problem with crime in this province. And it may interest this House to know that the number of car thefts here in this city alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, jumped from a 1995 figure of 2,200 to 3,300. In Saskatoon an increase over the same one-year period, not quite so dramatic. So how can we say everything's under control?

National statistics, Mr. Deputy Speaker, confirm that Saskatchewan — nothing to be proud of — has the highest and fastest-growing crime rate in Canada. Youth crime is acknowledged as one of the greatest contributors to this fact.

Between 1992 and 1995 the number of youths charged with robbery jumped 77 per cent; vehicle thefts 32 per cent; possession of stolen goods up 25 per cent. And it goes on and on. Possession of offensive weapons, 25.

What are we doing? We have a Justice minister that stands in this House and says, we don't have a problem with crime; there's no need to do anything about it. That's what I spoke about when I said there's no leadership in that government.

In Saskatoon there were more than 2,300 youths charged under the Young Offenders Act in the last two years, including — this is the sad part — 314 under the age of 14 years of age. That's child prostitution. We have a concern. Our side of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, wants to see this government do something. We're offering some suggestions and some ideas. What we need is some leadership, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(1515)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Are the people of Saskatchewan truly to take this government at its word when its words have been so meaningless for so long? I really don't think so. While the members opposite may feel they are smarter than the people of this province, that they can sell them anything, it's simply not true.

You couldn't fool the people of North Battleford and you won't fool the people of Melville or anywhere else for that matter. Until you are willing to show some real action, the people will not believe you have any real solutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the words in the throne speech sounded very, very nice. And yes, I wish I could believe them. But I don't believe them and neither do the people I represent. And in doing so, I regretfully cannot support this throne speech.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's again a pleasure to participate in debate in this great institution. Always at this point of the legislative proceedings there is some hope and optimism. I think there's a sense of anticipation about debates to come. It's a turning of the season as we turn from winter into spring. By the time we finish the session, the mood is always something a little bit different. We have to recognize that the legislative session can be intense, stressful, demanding. But in any event, Mr. Speaker, we're always glad to be back.

Mr. Speaker, first I want to say that your role and that of all the others who keep the legislative proceedings on track are vital to a successful session. I think we can be optimistic, based on the experience that the Speaker has and that you have as Deputy Speaker, that you will have a steady hand to guide us through some very difficult times.

As we enter into a legislative session, Mr. Speaker, we also spend far less time in our constituencies and in our constituency offices. Now more so than any other time of the year, we depend on our constituency assistants. These are the hard-working, I wouldn't say particularly well-paid, support staff who are vital to the functioning of the offices in our constituencies.

How vital, Mr. Speaker? Perhaps I can explain this by way of example. A few months ago I was in my office and my assistant was engaged on another matter when the phone rang — I think she was tied up on the other line — and I answered and I said, this is Harry Van Mulligen, you know, answering your call here. And the person said, well I want to speak to your assistant because she's the one that really knows what's going on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to extend a special word of appreciation, as other members have done, to all of the constituency assistants who work for all of us, no matter what side of the House we're on, for the hand work they do for us, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, these are also stressful and demanding times for our families, who must endure too much time without our presence and the support that we are obliged to provide for our families. And I think we need to recognize that too.

In the past, Mr. Speaker, I've described the constituency of Regina Victoria and it hasn't changed any great deal since last year. But I do want to say simply that I want to thank all of those constituents who wrote or called my office to express their concerns, or to express their ideas, and to express their questions about government direction and to give me their advice. I very much appreciated those calls, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to just briefly acknowledge the role of the mover of the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, the member for Swift Current, and also the seconder, the member for Saskatoon Southeast. I think these two

members have done a very commendable job. I very much appreciated, not only hearing the speech by the member for Swift Current, but also reading it again, because there is a great deal of wisdom in that speech and there is much to commend it, Mr. Speaker. And we congratulate him for his excellent performance in the House.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that many people in Saskatchewan will have had an opportunity to see the legislative proceedings live on their television. Hitherto, cable television has brought the legislature or the legislative proceedings to selected centres in Saskatchewan. Because of a change from, I believe, cable technology to satellite technology, the legislative proceedings are now available to many more people in Saskatchewan. I've heard — especially in rural Saskatchewan — I've heard members . . . I remember the member for Cypress Hills, Birch Hills, making express mention of the fact that this is the first time that many of their constituents would be able to see the legislative proceedings live, at first hand, Mr. Speaker. And I want to welcome them.

Now having said that, I want to explain something that just might confuse them a little bit. Now they know who's speaking. They know, for example, that I'm the member for Regina Victoria. I think they might even know which party I'm with because there will be a crawler that will go across the screen periodically to identify who it is that is speaking. So they know who's speaking.

Now they may not know that the successive speakers, Mr. Speaker, are speaking about the same province of Saskatchewan. You'd be hard pressed to know that we're speaking about the same place. One speaker will get up and sound very optimistic and be optimistic about Saskatchewan and where we are and where we've come from and where we're going into the future, Mr. Speaker. And the next speaker will be very pessimistic, the exact opposite, a case of black and a case of white, Mr. Speaker.

Now for example, Mr. Speaker, if you'll indulge me just for a moment. If you'll indulge me just for a moment, I want to illustrate what it is that I have to say by looking at the words of two members, okay? One is the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, who spoke about health care, and the other are the words of the member for Kelvington-Wadena, who also had something to say about health care.

An Hon. Member: — Would that be a Liberal?

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Yes, a Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena.

And I want to contrast, I want to contrast what it is that they had to say to this House and why it might be confusing for those at home to know, are they talking about the same thing? Are they talking about the same problems? Okay.

Now first the words for the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley, and I might say, Mr. Speaker, that I got these words off the Internet. I needed a copy. I was working at home. I didn't have access to *Hansard*, but I did have access to *Hansard* on-line on the Internet, and I was able to take her words off the

Internet at home and to be able to refer to them. This is a tremendous innovation, and I might say is another way that Saskatchewan people can hold the government and hold also those members accountable for what it is they say in this institution, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I digress here. I want to go back to the words of the member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley who spoke about health care, okay. Now this is a lengthy quote and I hope you'll indulge me. I hope you'll indulge me. The member for Regina Qu'Appelle Valley in speaking about health care said this:

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

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

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — So that's what she concluded, that we must be doing something right in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now let's contrast this with the words of the next speaker. The very next speaker in the legislature that very same day was the Liberal opposition member for Kelvington-Wadena. How did she describe the health care system? She uses words like "dysfunctional." She talks in terms like, the government administering beatings to the people of Saskatchewan.

Later, later she says the government is, and I quote her, "the killer of our health care system." Quote: "the killer of our health care system." All I can say is for those people at home, don't be alarmed, don't call the police. This kind of thing goes on all the time and we expect no less from the opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — In any event, that is the nature of the throne speech debate. It's the nature of the government to be optimistic and to look forward and to be realistic about where the province is going. And it's the nature, it's the nature of the

opposition to be pessimistic, to make it sound that Saskatchewan is in some kind of Stygian-type darkness, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Whenever the Liberals get up, there should be a language warning.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Now the member says that there should be a language warning on the screen, Mr. Speaker. I think that he's correct — that every time that a Liberal member does get up, that we should have an advisory alert for those less than 18 years of age or some such age, Mr. Speaker.

But the real question, the real question that faces Saskatchewan people and that faces us here, are we right to be optimistic or are we right, as you say, to be pessimistic? That is the question that faces Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, I think we are right to be optimistic. I think the speech delivered by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was right on the mark when it said at the outset, it said at the outset, the speech said right at the outset, that today is, quote, "one of the most hopeful times in our province in many years."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — The very first words of the throne speech: "one of the most hopeful times in our province in many years."

Now many speakers in this debate have fleshed out why it is that Saskatchewan people just might allow themselves a modicum of optimism at this point in our history, Mr. Speaker. Why it is they might allow themselves that, as opposed to taking some gloomy, pessimistic view of the years ahead, Mr. Speaker. And I would refer the members again to the contribution by the member for Swift Current, and also to the member for Regina Sherwood, Mr. Speaker.

What is really interesting to note, as did my colleague, the member for Regina Dewdney, in his remarks, he said not one, not one opposition speaker has seriously questioned that statement that today is "one of the most hopeful times in our province in many years."

They might have attacked us on health care, they might attack us on education, they might attack us on jobs and the economy, they might attack us on this and they might attack us on that, but not one took exception with that statement — that this is one of the most hopeful times in the province in many years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, those comments, those comments are optimism based on the realistic appraisal of where we have come from, what shape our finances are in, and the current and projected state of the economy. That's what causes us to believe that we are at one of the more hopeful times in our province's history.

Unlike the Grant Devine-style visions being espoused by the Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena, our visions are firmly based on reality, Mr. Speaker. Now I'm somewhat surprised, and I guess I ought not to be, that a Devine-like vision is coming from the Liberals.

(1530)

But yes, because like Devine, Grant Devine, well what she's saying is that yes, we should have a vision and we should look to the future, but we should kind of ignore finances. We should kind of ignore the balance sheet. We ought not to worry about those things. We should just look forward and look into the future; and that's where we want to go and that's where we want to be. But we shouldn't worry, we shouldn't worry about sort of niggling items like deficit and debt, or fiscal policy. None of that stuff. We shouldn't worry about that.

And in that respect, and in that respect, the Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena reminds me, reminds me firmly, of Grant Devine. I can recall Grant Devine clearly in this House when he was an opposition member, when he was an opposition member in estimates, grilling the member for North Battleford at that time — who was then the Minister of Energy — and going on at some length to try to get the Minister of Energy, the member for North Battleford, to agree with some project or some initiative that the member for Estevan then, Grant Devine, the former PC premier, favoured. Right.

He was going on at great length, and the minister would answer, and Grant Devine would get up again and quiz him again: well isn't this the right way to go? And he'd say, well you know, like we've got to look at the details and kind of sort these things out. There's a number of factors here that should be considered, etc., etc. But he'd get up again. But isn't this the right way to go? Well there are a number of factors. We should consider this. We should also consider the financial implications. And the member for Estevan, the then member for Estevan, Grant Devine, stood up and said something to the effect that, well we shouldn't worry about the money; the money will take care of itself.

Now that's the same approach that's being espoused by the Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena. And that is a very stark contrast — that is a very stark contrast about the members on this side and the members on that side. We say we need to concern ourselves with the finances of this province, that the finances of the province have to be a base from which we can spring forward, have to be a base from which we can plan for the future; that we cannot ignore these things. We can't ignore the finances of the province as you people did in the last provincial election, with this wild-eyed scheme of, well we'll cut the provincial sales tax by such a huge amount.

Well how will this be paid for? There'll be such, there'll be such . . . all your propeller heads who advised you said there will be such an increase, there will be such an increase in economic activity, there'll be an 8 per cent economic growth, but more and more revenues will come in. Well, Mr. Speaker . . .

An Hon. Member: — Don't forget Texas-style audits.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And of course, Texas-style audits. But that vision, that vision, that vision as to how the province . . . or how we ought to respect, how we ought to respect the people's finances, turned into your nightmare. And rightfully so, Mr.

Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — But I don't think they've learned a thing — they haven't learned a thing. I was just aghast, Mr. Speaker — I was aghast to hear the Liberal leader, I think it was the day or two, or maybe the day after his election as the leader . . . Let me just explain this.

Let me just explain what I mean by the Liberal leader, Mr. Speaker, because we have one Liberal leader who's not in the legislature, who's Dr. Melenchuk, and he's the Liberal leader who's also a research assistant for the Liberal caucus. That's one leader.

Now in addition to Dr. Melenchuk we have a Liberal leader in the House, which is the member for Canora. So we have two Liberal leaders.

Now in addition to that leader we have the former leader of the Liberals in the House. Or maybe he was the leader of all the Liberals at that point, I'm not really clear — the member for Melville — now we have three leaders — who's now the deputy leader.

And then of course we have the Liberal House Leader, the member for Melfort. As opposed to the Liberal leader in the House, we have the Liberal House Leader — just to make that distinction.

And then of course we have the former deputy leader of the Liberals and we have the former House leader of the Liberals. And then finally of course we have the member for Saskatoon Greystone, who is also a former leader of the Liberals.

I've lost track. What is it — 7 or 8 leaders in a group of 11 or 12 people? Mr. Speaker, I don't know.

But, Mr. Speaker, I digress. Mr. Speaker, I digress. I was going to say that I am simply aghast that the current Liberal leader — as distinct from all the other Liberal leaders — shortly after being elected, that leader, Dr. Melenchuk, said on, I think it was November 25 last year, shortly after being elected, that he plans on relieving taxation for business because in his words: "it would generate more retail outlet sales and provide more tax base for all of us and that would solve all the problems."

Well that's the same thing that they said in 1995, and it's obvious that they haven't learned a thing, Mr. Speaker, okay. That's their vision. That's their vision — cut taxes, close your eyes, cross your fingers, pray your prayers, consult Milton Friedman, and hope you don't bankrupt the province. That's the way to proceed. That's the way to proceed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, that's not our approach. That's not our approach. Our vision includes concrete plans for the future. Our visions are firmly based on reality, Mr. Speaker. Our visions are realized by people working purposefully, with determination to improve the lives of Saskatchewan people

brick by brick, stone by stone. However you want to describe it, Mr. Speaker, we do it step by step. No more risking the taxpayers' monies in wild-eyed, irrational schemes, Mr. Speaker. And I think the member for Saskatoon Southeast said it the best when she said, slow and sure wins the race; gaudy and greedy sinks the ship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And whatever thoughts Saskatchewan people might have about mixed metaphors, Mr. Speaker, I think Saskatchewan people support this approach that we take.

They support the leadership of the Premier, Mr. Speaker. They like the fact that his hand is on the tiller and guides the ship of state, and that there can be real confidence, real hope, real optimism, Mr. Speaker.

Now the Liberals can pretend, Mr. Speaker, that they had their finger on the pulse of Saskatchewan. They can pretend that, but sometimes I wonder if someone should be checking their temperature, Mr. Speaker, or has someone got the fingers around their throats, Mr. Speaker.

Is their unprecedented gloom and doom and pessimism reflective of their internal mood as a caucus, Mr. Speaker? That is a question we ask ourselves. Are we seeing stress symptoms of internal struggles? Is their legislative caucus still trying to cope with their many leaders within and without, Mr. Speaker? Is there dissension resulting from the last shuffle of responsibilities, Mr. Speaker? I suppose people with their frame of mind would have a gloomy, pessimistic outlook on things, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I find that they're not even positive about themselves, about who they are and what they stand for or what it is that they believe in. They don't say those kinds of things.

Now there was one exception to that, and that was the member for North Battleford. I heard him that night, Mr. Speaker, and I might say, I want to congratulate the member from North Battleford for his contribution to the House so far.

Now having said that, I knew the former member for North Battleford, Doug Anguish. I worked with him prior to us both being elected in 1986. I served with Doug Anguish on the Public Accounts Committee and of course here in the legislature for many years, Mr. Speaker, so I think I knew Doug Anguish. And the member for North Battleford now is no Doug Anguish. But he's doing a good job nevertheless.

He did try to define Liberalism. And he did it narrowly in the context of youth crime. Now he, talking about youth crime, concluded that — and this is a quote from the member for North Battleford, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member for North Battleford — he said, "Only the Liberals provide that middle, reasonable, positive voice of sanity between the two wild extremes."

And that's a Liberal, Mr. Speaker. He uses words such as reasonable, positive, sanity. And I would ask the member for North Battleford at an early opportunity if he could explain —

because he's explaining this in the context of crime, Mr. Speaker — how it is that his brothers and sisters in Ottawa, his Liberal colleagues there, could give faint hope to Clifford Olson, Mr. Speaker. Because there's nothing very reasonable, nothing very sane, nothing very positive about the actions of the federal government or the actions of Liberal in that regard, Mr. Speaker. None whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, I have absolutely nothing to say about the PC caucus or the Tories and the Justice system. Whatever I had to say about them, I said in March 1989 and I need not repeat my remarks that I made then, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the six points that highlight the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech outlined the government's general intentions to invest in Saskatchewan people in six ways, in six areas. First, investing in jobs and the economy; secondly, investing in the quality of education and training; thirdly, investing in our children, reducing child poverty — part of a far-reaching and progressive welfare reform; fourthly, ensuring a secure, stable health system; fifth, renewing our highways and transportation system; and sixth, preserving a key accomplishment, a return to fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I'd like to briefly touch on each of these areas. First with respect to jobs and the economy — jobs and the economy. The members of the Liberal caucus, the members of the Liberal caucus can say whatever they like. They can say whatever they like about the Saskatchewan economy. They can say whatever they want because I tell you, actions speak a lot stronger than words, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And I don't want to repeat all the statistics that suggest that the Saskatchewan economy is doing well, but I want to deal, I want to deal with one action in particular which speaks very strongly, very strongly about the Saskatchewan economy. And these are the actions of the federal government, your Liberal brothers and sisters in Ottawa — their actions vis-a-vis our economy, okay.

Now in Canada we have a concept known as equalization. Equalization is a way for the federal government to divert federal funds to those provincial economies in provinces that are deemed not to be doing as well as some average threshold, and therefore need the funds to be able to provide relatively the same services and programs for Canadians in those provinces as distinct for Canadians in other provinces. So someone in Newfoundland, someone in Newfoundland can have access, relatively speaking, to the same level of services that someone in Kelowna, British Columbia, might have, or in Calgary, Alberta.

That is the concept of equalization, and equalization works in this way. If your economy improves, if your economy improves relative to other provincial economies in the country, then the amount of your equalization is reduced because the federal government takes the point of view — and that's the nature of equalization — if you're able to generate your own revenues, then you don't need the revenues from Ottawa.

If your economy is not doing as well compared to other economies, then your equalization payments are increased. Because then if they deem that, well your economy is not doing as well; you can't generate your own revenues so therefore you need the transfers from Ottawa to be able to provide the same level of services and programs relatively speaking, in your province, the same as any other province in this country, Mr. Speaker . . . It's called sharing. It's called sharing the national wealth. That's what it is.

But now, what has happened in Saskatchewan with respect to equalization? If the Liberal members are correct, and that our economy is so bad and terrible and it's not doing well and it's . . . oh it's such a terrible thing, then you would think that equalization payments would be going up. Is this not true? Is this not true? If the economy is doing so badly, as you say it is, then our equalization payments should be going up. That's logical. That's how the federal government, your Liberal brothers and sisters, your Liberal cousins in Ottawa — that's how they act.

On the other hand, what is really happening in Saskatchewan, vis-a-vis equalization, is that since 1991-92 we have seen a massive decrease in equalization payments from Ottawa because it reflects the strength of the Saskatchewan economy, Mr. Speaker.

(1545)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — In 1991 . . . and these figures you can get from your cousins in Ottawa. Don't believe my figures. Go phone up Mr. Paul Martin and get the figures from him. But in 1991 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . if he'll take your call. In 1991-92 Saskatchewan received about \$479 million in equalization payments.

In 1996-97, the current fiscal year, we now receive \$258 million in equalization payments — a reduction of \$220 million in the five years, a reduction of 46 per cent. In contrast I might say, to Manitoba, which in '91-92 received \$853 million in equalization payments as opposed to the current year when they received \$1.039 billion dollars — an increase of 22 per cent.

So Ottawa is saying, you in Saskatchewan, your economy is doing reasonably well; we're going to cut back on your equalization payments, as opposed to Manitoba where we're going to increase the equalization payments because their economy relative to Saskatchewan's economy and other economies is not doing as well, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member says, what about Alberta? Alberta is a "have" province. B.C. (British Columbia) is a "have" province. Ontario is a "have" province. And I hope soon that we too will be a "have" province, Mr. Speaker.

I just might also say that it's an interesting contrast to what's happening here in Saskatchewan, good old NDP Saskatchewan with this bad economy that you talk about and contrast it with the Liberal economies in Atlantic Canada — Newfoundland, where equalization payments have gone up by 9 per cent; or

Nova Scotia, where they've gone up by 33 per cent to \$1.129 billion . . . (inaudible) . . . Mr. Speaker.

So the members can say what they like, they can say what they like. I frankly don't care what they say about the provincial economy. The proof is in the pudding — or more accurately, the proof is in the equalization payments. This economy is doing quite well, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, this is not the only inconsistency that we can see in their speeches when describing Saskatchewan economy. I was particularly, particularly interested to read the remarks of the member for Humboldt, Mr. Speaker. And I say particularly because I happened to be speaking oh, about a month or two ago to someone in Humboldt about their reasons moving from Regina to Humboldt. But more about that.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Humboldt said in her remarks — the Liberal member for Humboldt, the doom and gloom Liberal member for Humboldt, Mr. Speaker, said in her remarks:

I suggest the Premier and the honourable minister of . . . economic development listen to the definition of the word "stagnant". According to Webster's *New World Dictionary*, stagnant means "without motion, not flowing or moving, a lack of movement, lacking in activity or interest, sluggish." Need I say more, Mr. Speaker?

These very words (these very words, she said) — sluggish, without movement, lacking activity or interest — are an apt description of the Saskatchewan economy.

Now this is the member from Humboldt. And I was very, very interested to hear her remarks because it contrasted sharply with the telephone conversation that I had a few months ago with somebody in Humboldt who tells me that they had difficulty finding housing in Humboldt, Mr. Speaker, because there is too many people moving to Humboldt because of the local economy. She tells me that her husband is enrolled in a welding course and before they can finish, there are companies at the door trying to entice these students out into their industries because they're so desperate for workers, Mr. Speaker.

What did I find out from the economic development officer in Humboldt, Mr. Speaker? He says there is a serious shortage of labour and housing in the Carlton Trail region, i.e., Humboldt, Mr. Speaker.

So how can she say on the one hand that the economy is sluggish and at the same time in Humboldt the economy is just simply white-hot, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — There are some words we dare not use in this institution, Mr. Speaker. But to say that this is a contradiction of immense proportion, we can say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, there is one other issue that concerns

me and that I'm very concerned about, and this is something that my colleague, the member for Regina Wascana, raised in her remarks, and that is the conservative attack that I see not only in the context of this throne speech and the various members who have raised this — the member for Humboldt, I believe; the member for Kelvington-Wadena; other members, Conservative members have raised this — and that is their attack on occupation and health . . . occupational health and safety regulations that have come forward as a result of improvements to occupational health and safety legislation a few years ago, Mr. Speaker.

And their attack all seems to be based on this basic premiss — and the member for Regina Wascana talked about this — that if you do away with these regulations, it'll mean more jobs for Saskatchewan people. That seems to be the position they're taking.

Well, Mr. Speaker, all I can say is, don't do this, don't do this. Don't do this to the working people of Saskatchewan — don't do this. Don't bring us down, okay? Do what you can, do what you can to ensure a safe working environment for Saskatchewan people. Please do that. Don't attack in this way.

I was interested that even as I was, you know, as we were listening to this non-ending attack on occupational health and safety, this non-ending attack on the government — and I might say, a non-ending attack on working people in Saskatchewan by saying that you deserve something less than the very best — that I received from United Steelworkers of America, a document called *Death by Deregulation: The Story of Westray*, Mr. Speaker, and this is a very sad chapter in Canadian history.

But the report that they provided me is based on their submission to the Westray inquiry, and they conclude by saying:

The Westray disaster happened because regulations governing mining practices and safety were not followed, and because the government, while fully aware of the situation, did not step in to enforce the law. Such behaviour is not unique to coal mines or to Nova Scotia. It is a result of the deregulation of health and safety, a policy goal now pursued by governments and employers across Canada.

And I might say parenthetically, thankfully not by this government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And I go on here, Mr. Speaker, to read this quote:

Every day in this country people die from work-related accidents and illnesses. Many more are injured or incapacitated by their work. Like all these victims, the twenty-six miners who died at Westray were ordinary people. They went to work to make a living and to provide for their families. Nobody went to work to die.

The point is simple. Work can be made safe and healthy.

With our advanced science and technology, and with all our resources to create wealth, there is no reason or excuse for a Westray explosion.

And I might say, with all the wealth and all the resources that we have in this country, there is simply no reason to risk the lives of workers as they . . . (inaudible) . . . Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And so I hope you'll work with us to improve working conditions in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to, I want to turn to what is the second priority as outlined in the Speech from the Throne. And what I see here is a curious double standard, a double standard which has risen again today in the legislature; was apparent again the other day. And this is the Liberals — and the Tories, for that matter, but the Liberals particularly — attacking the government because there are closures in schools in various communities in Saskatchewan.

They ignore the fact that even while funding has increased in previous years, schools close. Why do schools close? Because demographics change. People feel that they no longer want to support their community. They want to do their shopping elsewhere. They want to do their work elsewhere. But it should come as no surprise that at the end of the day that the government and the local institutions also have to question whether or not they can provide the same level of service, Mr. Speaker. Okay?

But they attack us nevertheless and try to hold us responsible for these closures, when these in many . . . these are local decisions, Mr. Speaker. But not a word, not a word, not one, not one from them about Ottawa — Ottawa actually offloading and cutting back on its expenditures for health care. We'll have one member say here, oh the province ought to do more for universities, we ought to do more for post-secondary education, we ought to do more for training, we ought to do more for students. We should do these things, we should find the money to do these things — and criticize us because we're not doing enough.

And I admit that we should be doing more. I think all of us share that opinion. We want to do more. We want to provide the very best education system. That's why it's one of our high priorities, Mr. Speaker. We want to do these things.

But for them to stand in this House, stand in this House to criticize the provincial government for putting more money into education and saying it's not enough, but never one word, not one peep about what the federal government is doing in this area, Mr. Speaker.

And I guess the question that people at home at some point have to ask themselves, how credible are you people? How credible can you people be? How credible can you be when you criticize us for these things? How credible can you be when you refuse to say one word about the federal government and their offloading? Not one word from them, Mr. Speaker. Where's their credibility?

Mr. Speaker, the third priority that is outlined in the Speech from the Throne is the commitment by the government to invest in children and to reducing child poverty, Mr. Speaker. And I don't want to belabour the point. I think my colleague, the member for Saskatoon Sutherland, spoke clearly, eloquently, completely, on this topic, in this matter, Mr. Speaker, and I don't want to . . . and I would simply be repeating his words.

I can say that I sense some agreement from all sides of the House. There's agreement that we work together to deal with this problem of child poverty. That we find within ourselves and among ourselves the will, the way, to deal concretely with this issue. That's what I sense. Having said that, I would ask the Liberals to please mute your criticism, mute your criticism about us putting more money into initiatives such as child poverty.

I would, you know . . . we heard, I think it was from the member for Humboldt, no end of criticism that we're not doing enough at this point. And I just simply want to emphasize we have put more money, more money — how many times can I underline the word more? — more money, more, more, more money into supporting children and poverty. We increased it, notwithstanding all of the issues that faced us. All of the issues that faced us — debt, deficit — whatever you want to call it. In the darkest days of '91-92, we said it's important that we increase our funding for this important area. And we did — and we have — and we'll do more. Okay. We've done that. Okay.

(1600)

Now we also have moved I think, the nation forward to recognizing that this problem of poverty among children is an important policy issue that must be dealt with. And thanks to the leadership of the Premier and other ministers, we've been able to do this, to put this on the national table.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And, Mr. Speaker, there seems to be now some national accord, some national agreement that we move forward in this important matter, okay. I sense that.

Now I guess in that context I would just simply ask the Liberal members to work with us in this issue; not to on the one hand criticize us because we're not putting in enough, but at the same hand, mute all of your criticisms about the cut-backs that Ottawa is inflicting on poor people when it comes to their reduction in transfer payments. Because that's what it is. Now if you want to work with us in this important area, and I hope that you will, then please let's work together. Don't criticize us in this area and we won't criticize your federal Liberals either, but let's work together in this area.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth priority that's outlined in the Speech from the Throne — and it's four of six so . . . I know the member's looking at his watch, Mr. Speaker, but this is an important area.

Now earlier I mentioned the conflicting statements about health care as articulated by the member for Regina Qu'Appelle

Valley and the Liberal member for Kelvington-Wadena. Conflicting statements, and I don't want to repeat them at this time. Although none of her colleagues use her excessive language, such as beatings, killer of medicare, predictably most Liberal comments are of the same ilk. The language is not quite as excessive as that Liberal member, but they're similar.

Now there are two exceptions, okay — two exceptions of this non-ending attack on the provincial government about health care. Two exceptions. First of all is the member for North Battleford, okay. And I might say you better get a grip on the member for North Battleford. You don't want to have him saying positive things about health care, Mr. Speaker, when it's your line to get out nothing but negative comments about health care, okay.

Now in his remarks the member for North Battleford quoted a government poll, okay — a government poll.

An Hon. Member: — You read that earlier there. You're repeating yourself.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — No, no, no, no.

An Hon. Member: — Sure.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — No, no, no.

The member for North Battleford said that most people — and he's quoting from a government poll — most people continue to be reasonably satisfied with the level of care they receive.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Those are his words. I think in actual fact it's the vast majority of people continue to be satisfied with the level of health care they receive, Mr. Speaker, but I'm not going to quibble about that. But the fact is that the member for North Battleford said that people continue to be reasonably satisfied with the level of care they receive.

My question is, which is it? Is the government the killers of medicare that the member for Kelvington-Wadena suggests? Or are people continuing to receive the health care that they want and need in Saskatchewan, as the member for North Battleford suggests? Because you can't have it both ways . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the Premier says the Liberals are both right, and I guess that probably reflects Liberals, Mr. Speaker. These are people that can speak out of both sides of their mouth at one time, Mr. Speaker.

Now I don't doubt that there are anxieties, concerns about health care. Health care has seen a very major transformation these last three years. The process of change is never easy, never easy, no matter what you do. And of course you should know that because you're undergoing quite a change yourself in your caucus, and it kind of reflects that you people aren't adjusting very well to that.

But the process of change is never easy — never easy. And it's especially not easy in a sensitive area like health care. But there have been and there will continue to be improvements, Mr.

Speaker. There will continue to be improvements because that's our priority, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Even if it's not the priority of the federal government — the Liberal federal government, Mr. Speaker. They were faced with a choice. And I think it's the member for Regina South who went on at some length about how it is that social spending reflects about 17 per cent or 17 cents of every dollar in Ottawa. But that is the area that the federal government sought to cut significantly — the federal Liberal government. The federal Liberal government, in setting its fiscal house in order, sought to cut funding for health care, Mr. Speaker. It's a shame, but that's what they did.

They said, we're faced with these decisions; we're faced with the conflict in terms of where we spend our money. They said it's our priority to cut health care. That's what they said. That's what they said.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Now they cut health care. They cut health care. And my question is, if you're truly committed, if you're truly committed to a better health care system, if you're truly committed to a national vision of health, Mr. Speaker, can you pray tell us what it is that you've done as a Liberal caucus to register the concerns of Saskatchewan people to the federal government about their cuts in health care.

Can you maybe table for the House, can you maybe table for the House what it is that you've done in this regard? Have you phoned or have you written or have you faxed or have you e-mailed or in any way communicated with the Prime Minister in this area, maybe with the Minister of Health, maybe the Minister of Finance?

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Order. Now all hon. members will be well aware that it is better to put the comments on the record than to be shouting them across the floor from both sides of the House. And I'll ask all hon. members to allow the hon. member for Regina Victoria to proceed in a way that is audible to everyone.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So my question is would you be prepared to table with the Clerk of the legislature any copy of any correspondence, maybe even a telephone slip, a copy of an e-mail, maybe a copy of a fax, maybe a scribbling on the back of an envelope which reflected your thoughts about the next time I see the Prime Minister I should tell him these things? Anything at all. Would you be prepared to table with the Clerk of the legislature your concern about cuts in health care? Would you be prepared to do that?

Can you tell us just how far your concerns in cuts in health care extended? Did they extend to, in any way, communicating this with the Prime Minister of Canada, with the Finance minister in Ottawa, maybe with the Minister of Health, maybe with Ralph Goodale as the senior minister responsible for Saskatchewan, maybe with a back-bench Member of Parliament, maybe with one of their aides in one of their offices — anybody at all, Mr.

Speaker? Did you tell anybody about your concerns about their cuts to our health care system, Mr. Speaker?

Well judging from their comments, there hasn't been any such communication, Mr. Speaker. And my question is their new Liberal leader, the doctor, just what kind of an oath does he demand of his Liberal members? Is it the Hippocratic oath or is it the hypocritical oath?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order. The Chair recognizes that all hon. members are enthused by the possibility of a rambunctious debate, but I would encourage that we do it within the rules of debate. And I'd ask all hon. members to keep the House in reasonable order and allow the hon. member for Regina Victoria to continue.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, obviously we hit upon a few dangling participles in the comments here, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that there were two exceptions to this universal condemnation by the Liberal caucus when it comes to the government's record on health care. There are two exceptions — two exceptions, Mr. Speaker.

I already dealt with the member for North Battleford, who actually had some good things to say about health care in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. He said that people were satisfied, the vast majority of people were satisfied with our health care system.

Now the second was the member for Arm River. He was too busy dealing with other things related to health care to really have much time condemning the government about health care, Mr. Speaker.

Now the comments by the member for Arm River are interesting. And they're interesting because the member for Arm River is the Liberal Health critic, the person who's appointed by the Leader of the Liberal Party to speak for them in health care issues. That's Dr. Melnychuk, the Liberal leader who is outside the caucus, as opposed to the member for Canora, who is the Liberal . . . who is the leader of the Liberals in the House and as opposed to the Liberal House Leader.

Now the member for Arm River is the Liberal Health critic. And he was — and we will know in this House even if the public doesn't know — that the member for Arm River was the first and the strongest supporter of Dr. Melnychuk in his pursuit of the leadership of the Liberal Party. That's why he got his reward. He's now the Health critic as opposed to the member for Wood Mountain who used to be the Health critic and now got shuffled off to something else. So the member for Arm River is now the Health critic — okay? — and reflects his solid support for the Liberal leader.

Now we can assume, we can assume that when the member for Arm River speaks about health care that he speaks for the Liberal leader, Mr. Speaker. Verbatim, I would suspect, Mr.

Speaker.

Now his speech was less condemning than it was an explanation of the Liberal leader's stand on health care, Mr. Speaker. And what did we learn, Mr. Speaker? Well it was a very interesting speech indeed. Now I wasn't sure what I was reading so again I pulled his speech off the Internet as well, Mr. Speaker. And a wonderful innovation this is, because it allowed me to work from home and access *Hansard* at the same time, Mr. Speaker. It's a wonderful innovation.

Now what we learn is that the Liberal leader wants to do away with elected health boards and he wants to replace them with regional corporations that have appointed directors which is, as I gather, the Australian model. Probably be seven or eight regional corporations . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Maybe one or two regional corporations in all of Saskatchewan responsible for health care. And this is opposed to the 4 or 500 local boards which he says he prefers.

Now I'm a bit confused here because he said, the member for Arm River — and we can assume that he's speaking for the Liberal leader — simply said, it means the former government structure — that is, 4 or 500 boards — was more cost-effective, more decentralized, and more locally accountable.

Then he goes on to say incredibly, now we find ourselves in a situation where we can't return to the previous structure mainly because it's not desirable in a rapidly changing health care environment. So he says, my preference is 4 or 500 boards; then he says, well we can't return to that.

Then he says, my real preference is a few regional corporations with . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . One regional . . . or one corporation to administer all health care, Mr. Speaker, with appointed members. Now there is a real inconsistency here about what it is that your position is.

On the one hand you say, well our real preference is for 4 or 500 boards, and I must say there's nothing to prevent you if you're the government for moving back to having 4 or 500 boards. I'm not sure what it is that the member says when he says that in a rapidly changing health care environment we can't move back to those boards. Is the member perhaps admitting that those boards didn't work out very well?

Why didn't he just say so, that that model didn't work? Is he agreeing with us that model doesn't work, Mr. Speaker? That's what it sounds like to me, that what he's saying.

(1615)

He agrees with us that the old model didn't work. That it can't work in the kind of environment that we have, Mr. Speaker.

Now we also learn . . . we also learn from the member's remarks that the Liberal leader — Dr. Melnychuk, the leader outside the House — is sensitive and defensive about an interview that he did shortly after being elected, on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television, on CBC television.

Now what is it that the member said?

Now the interviewer is Costa Maragos from CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television. He says . . . he's asking Dr. Melenchuk:

Let's talk about the NDP. Last week, the Royal Bank said Saskatchewan would be the first province to be debt-free. Who were you thinking of when you heard that?

Melenchuk: I was thinking that Saskatchewan people have done a tremendous job because their taxes, utilities, and tariff rates have been increased (by) \$1.3 billion since 1992. And that balancing occurs at a direct transfer from their bank account to the bank account of the Saskatchewan government.

Okay, fair enough. We weren't asking the people in Manitoba to pay for our debt problems, or Alberta for that matter. But fair enough. Okay.

Maragos: What inefficiencies would you find to make up that \$1.3 billion?

Maragos from CBC TV: What inefficiencies would you find to make up that \$1.3 billion?

Melenchuk: Well, health care . . .

Health care?

Maragos: How much would you save there? Give . . . a number?

Melenchuk: I don't know, because I haven't seen the numbers. I'll have to look at the numbers.

Maragos: If you don't know, then how can you say that?

Melenchuk: Because I know there are inefficiencies in the system and I understand health care reform, and I understand health care systems. And I know that there are inefficiencies in the system right now (Mr. Speaker).

Mr. Van Mulligen: — No, he wasn't very clear about those inefficiencies, Mr. Speaker.

Now the member for Arm River wanted to point out that nowhere did our leader say that he would chop \$1.3 billion from the provincial health care system. But he did indicate that current efficiencies in our administration would address part of this goal. It's not quite what he said, but I admit, I admit that no person, no sane person could advocate chopping \$1.3 billion out of a \$1.6 billion health care budget, Mr. Speaker. Even for the Tories that's a bit of a stretch, Mr. Speaker. Okay?

But the question is and I guess the point is that when asked where would you find these inefficiencies, where is it that you would cut? Where is it that you would cut?

His number one priority — number one, Mr. Speaker, not number two — his number one priority for cuts is health care, Mr. Speaker — health care. Shame, Mr. Speaker.

And I would venture to say, Mr. Speaker, I would venture to say that if these are not cuts, then the good doctor will come forward and tell us about the hundreds of millions of dollars about health care inefficiencies that he knows about but he won't tell us about because I think Saskatchewan people will be wanting to ask some questions about where it is that you want to cut the health care budget, Mr. Speaker.

So let's hear from the good doctor about where it is that he proposes to save hundreds of millions of dollars in health care spending, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear about this. We, we the NDP government, we put more money into health care, Mr. Speaker — more dollars. More dollars.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Admittedly, not enough. And admittedly, this is something that needs to be addressed in the coming budget. But we put more money into health care, Mr. Speaker, as opposed to the Liberals in Ottawa. What did they do? Cut, Mr. Speaker. As opposed to the Liberal leader whose first priority is, Mr. Speaker, to cut, Mr. Speaker, in health care, Mr. Speaker.

The hypocrisy of it all, Mr. Speaker. The hypocrisy of it all to say that when we the NDP put money in, it's never enough. But then to have the unmitigated gall to say, elect us, then we're going to cut, well, Mr. Speaker, that's quite a standard.

Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes that are remaining to me, I want to quickly touch on an area that other members have touched upon, and that's the area of transportation, Mr. Speaker. That is a priority in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker.

Now I don't have much to say because other members, including the member from Saskatoon Northwest, has spoken very eloquently on this topic. But I just want to say one thing, Mr. Speaker.

The federal Liberal government, the federal Liberal government would have not have dared — would not have dared to do anything remotely similar to other areas of Canada, to other groups in Canada, as what they did to Saskatchewan farmers in cutting the Crow rate benefit, Mr. Speaker. They would not have dared to do that.

Now whatever you believe, whatever you believe about the Crow rate . . . and I know that there are many, many members on that side of the House, the Tories included, who don't believe in a subsidized form of grain transportation. They don't believe in subsidized grain transportation. They don't believe in those kind of subsidies. There are other members who believe that there is a role for the federal government to ensure that our grain transportation, that the Americans don't have all of the advantage in terms of getting the grain to port. And that's an ideological debate.

But I don't think that anyone can deny, anyone can deny the severity of the cut — about \$400 million on an annual basis. No other area, no other region, no other group in Canada would have stood for that kind of punishment by the Liberal government. It's as if they were saying, there's not enough

Liberals out there in Saskatchewan for us to really worry about, Mr. Speaker, so let's go ahead and do it.

And again, would you, on this matter, table for the House what it is that you have to say, Mr. Speaker, what it is that the members have had to say about this cut in entitlement to Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker? Would you kindly tell the House what it is you've done in this regard, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by basically making a few remarks about finance, if I might be permitted to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — And I might say for the PC's, we hear the same old story when it comes to finance. The member from Moosomin gives some grudging acknowledgement that we've had a debt and deficit problem in Saskatchewan. He kind of acknowledges his government has dealt with it in an appropriate fashion. Then he goes on to say the same old stuff that they always say — well you know there was a debt before Grant Devine took over and he just simply kind of carried on with it, you know, so it wasn't anything that we really did; we're just kind of carrying on. Which as we all know — I'd put it for want of a better word, Mr. Speaker — is just so much malarkey.

There was a \$3 billion debt in the Crowns, which during their tenure in office moved from \$3 billion to \$5 billion. What is mostly significant though about their term in office, is the accumulated deficits. Where there was zero accumulated deficit, zero taxpayer supported debt in 1982, which then ballooned to about \$8 billion in I believe 1991, in a space of nine years, Mr. Speaker; and on top of that, there of course other debt in terms of guarantees that they undertook with respect to Crown Life and so on and so on, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, all I can say to that member and to the other Conservative members, you won't be credible unless you 'fess up. You have to acknowledge that something went wrong here in the 1980s. You have to come clean on this, Mr. Speaker. The members have to come clean.

And of course, the other refrain we heard is so typical of the Tories. The member for Cypress Hills said, well you know there is more money around and I think everything would be okay if you just put more money into highways in my constituency. This is how we got into problems in the '80s — selfish Tories saying as long as you take care of my town and my constituency, everything else is okay. You know the money will look after itself. Well of course we know that's not the way things work. And of course, they all sing from the same Milton Friedman supply . . . (inaudible) . . . songbook — cut the taxes, let the deficit and debt take care of itself, Mr. Speaker.

Of course there's a curious twist to this with the Tory leader saying we should let people know now when we're going to cut the sales tax in the coming years so they can prepare for this. Well this is a brilliant stroke if I've ever heard one, Mr. Speaker. You can sure shut down the car dealerships in January, February, and March, I would think, not to mention a lot of other economic activity as people wait for the cut. Now that's a

real brilliant stroke.

Now the Liberals — what do they have to say about the government's fiscal policy? Now one, I might say that there is virtually no recognition at all that the present fiscal policy is the right policy, Mr. Speaker. There's a total silence on issues of deficit and debt. Well the member for North Battleford again, did allude to the fact that there was a perilous debt in Saskatchewan. Is that the words that he used? A perilous debt in Saskatchewan. Okay?

Their sort of understanding of fiscal policy is simply to plead for understanding of the difficult choices being placed by Ottawa and its deficit fight. Not about here in Saskatchewan but in Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. But as to Saskatchewan, silence.

And of course, many Liberals parrot that old right-winged mantra that was the platform, their basic platform in 1995. Cut taxes, close your eyes, hope for the best, don't worry about the deficit debt; those things will take care of themselves, Mr. Speaker.

Also I might say there's been a total silence this year on the harmonization of the provincial sales tax with the goods and services tax. I would have thought, given the wonderful experience of people in Atlantic Canada are now experiencing, that you might have made some proposals as you have in the past — some of you people have made in the past — about harmonizing the PST with the GST (goods and services tax).

And explain while you're at it, why you would want to transfer hundreds of millions of dollars in commitments from businesses onto the backs of consumers. But we haven't heard anything. And my invitation stands, an invitation I made last year when I said, if you put forward a motion about harmonization of the GST with the PST, we'll debate it in this legislature. So just any time you want to, you bring that forward and we'll debate it, Mr. Speaker. I wish you would let us know your thoughts on this.

Now finally, Mr. Speaker — and this is the one that really gets me — there seems to be what I would call, for want of a better word, kind of a dumbing-down process when I look at the remarks to members of the Liberal opposition.

This is kind of taking questions by those who are not representatives from the public who may not know public finances and ask innocent questions about, well where does the money go? — but then to have those members repeat them in a rhetorical fashion in this Chamber.

The member for Saltcoats is a good example, Mr. Speaker. He said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find the most difficult . . . I find the most difficult to understand these are finances. Okay? And there's a great deal of detail here about the government reaping the benefits of all this wealth, and the debt not being paid down — which it has incidentally — cuts continue, and he doesn't really understand what's happening to the money, Mr. Speaker.

Well I would say that admitting your ignorance in these matters is no virtue, is no virtue. The point is that you are the representatives of the people. It is your job, it is your obligation

to understand these matters. You have to know about these things. You must do more than simply dumbing down and repeating what it is that people are innocently asking you. You have to know the answers to these things, Mr. Speaker.

Now I just want to briefly, Mr. Speaker . . . I think it was Josef Redlich in 1903 in *The Procedure of the House of Commons* who said it the best: "The whole law of finance" . . . and this is chapter 1, the "Fundamental Principles":

The whole law of finance, and consequently the whole British constitution (and that's us too) is grounded upon one fundamental principle, laid down at the very outset of the English parliamentary history and secured by three hundred years of mingled conflict with the Crown and peaceful growth. All taxes and public burdens imposed upon the nation for purposes of state, whatsoever their nature, must be granted by the representatives of the citizens and taxpayers, *i.e.*, by Parliament.

By the representatives of the citizens and taxpayers. Now it seems to me that assumes some basic education or assumes some knowledge on the part of members about how finances work; that we have a right to expect, and their constituents have a right to expect, more than those naïve, rhetorical questions about, well gee, where has all the money gone. Because the answers are there.

The Provincial Auditor for years was complaining that members didn't have the information that allowed them to make an analysis of where it is the money went. And it's for that reason that this government brought in summary financial statements, so that everyone can understand just where it is that our money is going.

Is there any question you have about anything? Questions about the Bi-Provincial upgrader or the Cameco Corporation shares, Saskferco Products, Wascana Energy, SaskFor-MacMillan Limited partnership, Meadow Lake Pulp Limited Partnership, NewGrade Energy Inc. — anything that you want to know. The Liquor Board. The Liquor and Gaming Authority. There's surpluses.

Is there anything that you wanted to know? It's here. It's here. But of course you have to be able to read. But we do expect that you do that. And we do expect that you rise above ignorance. And we do expect that you acquit yourself honourably and well on behalf of your constituents and not to raise silly, naïve, rhetorical questions in this House, Mr. Speaker.

(1630)

Mr. Speaker, my time . . . and I might say that I see that there's no one in this House is sleeping, contrary to what Murray Mandryk has to say, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Where's Murray? Maybe he's sleeping.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well Mandryk said that a deep sleeper is anyone who's listened to me more than three minutes. And this is more like three hours and people are still awake, Mr. Speaker — and Mandryk's not in the House, of course; he

rarely comes in here except for question period. He's probably sleeping.

Let me just say I support the motion. I support the throne speech. It's a document of hope, it's a document of optimism. The priorities are right — jobs, education, children in poverty, health care, transportation, and maintaining our fiscal policy. Mr. Speaker, these are the right directions for 1997 and into the future. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The division bells rang from 4:32 p.m. until 4:36 p.m.

Motion agreed to on the following recorded division.

Yeas — 39

Romanow	Flavel	Van Mulligen
Wiens	MacKinnon	Lingenfelter
Shillington	Mitchell	Atkinson
Tchorzewski	Johnson	Whitmore
Goulet	Lautermilch	Upshall
Kowalsky	Crofford	Renaud
Calvert	Pringle	Koenker
Trew	Bradley	Lorje
Scott	Teichrob	Nilson
Cline	Stanger	Hamilton
Murray	Wall	Kasperski
Ward	Sonntag	Jess
Langford	Murrell	Thomson

Nays — 13

Krawetz	McPherson	McLane
Gantefoer	Draude	Osika
Hillson	Julé	Aldridge
Boyd	Heppner	Goohsen
Haverstock		

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTIONS

Address be Engrossed and Presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor

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

That the said address be engrossed and presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are of the Executive Council.

Motion agreed to.

Ways and Means

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

That this Assembly, pursuant to rule 92, hereby appoints

the Committee of Finance to consider the supply be granted to Her Majesty, and to consider the ways and means of raising the supply.
Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:42 p.m.

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