

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the construction of a new facility in La Loche, a new hospital that will provide adequate health care centre to the northern residents.

And the people that have signed the petition, Mr. Speaker, are people like James Janvier, Pio Janvier, John Harpe, Mary Piche, Archie Janvier, Margaret Herman, Dorothy Sylvestre, Guy Janvier, and the list goes on.

And I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present petitions once again of people throughout the province that have been affected by big game damage. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from Chaplin in the Thunder Creek constituency, and Pelly and Kamsack areas of the province.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

And the following petitions for private Bills are hereby read and received.

Of the Lutheran Church of Canada, in the province of Saskatchewan, praying for an Act to provide for the continuation of the Lutheran Church-Canada, Central

District; and

Of The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company, Montreal Trust company of Canada, and the Montreal Trust company in the province of Saskatchewan, praying for an Act respecting those respective companies; and

Of the TD Trust Company and Central Guaranty Trust Company, praying for an Act respecting TD Trust and Central Guaranty Trust Company.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Twining of the Yellowhead

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased last week when the Minister of Highways and Transportation announced that the Yellowhead highway would be twinned, albeit by the year 2012.

Mr. Speaker, the most dangerous single stretch of highway in Saskatchewan and the one which costs the most fatalities is the Yellowhead from the Battlefords to the Alberta border. I would hope that this could be given a much higher priority than 15 years; especially the entrance of Highway 40 into the Yellowhead has been a serious issue before. It is now especially serious in view of the construction of the Pool terminal at Brada, and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has identified that as a serious issue in the construction of their terminal.

Mr. Speaker, my predecessor as member for the Battlefords promised in 1952 that he would twin the Yellowhead. I am delighted that the NDP (New Democratic Party) is keeping that promise. I just wish it wouldn't have to take 60 years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Horizontal Drilling Activity

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Renewed confidence and optimism are encompassing our oil and gas industry. The exploration and discovery of new reserves has only heightened the interest throughout the province, which not only benefit our provincial economy but also encourages job creation.

As part of this new-found interest in this industry, Saskatchewan is hosting the fifth international Williston basin horizontal drilling workshop, which is now under way here in Regina.

The new discovery of deep oil deposits in the Williston basin, which encompasses the south-east portion of the province, have increased interest in our oil and gas sector. The south-east area, Mr. Speaker, is the most active area in Saskatchewan for oil production, accounting for over half of the province's total production. And now with deep oil reserves being found, that production may increase.

Furthermore, horizontal drilling activity has increased from 8 per cent of the total monthly average in 1991 to over 50 per cent in 1996 and has increased our total oil production by 40

per cent.

This workshop, Mr. Speaker, will help our oil industry expand its knowledge and expertise in this increasingly important area of oil exploration and recovery. It will also serve as an avenue for increasing cross-border business opportunities for oil producers and service companies.

This year's workshop is co-sponsored by Saskatchewan Energy and Mines and the North Dakota Geological Survey and has attracted over 650 oil industry delegates, which signifies the importance . . .

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

Leader of the Opposition's Birthday

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a very deep concern about the openness of certain members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House often urge more openness and accountability in the legislature. And today I have only the latest example of a member not being completely honest with the rest of the voters.

Mr. Speaker, the member I speak of is the Leader of the Opposition and the member from Canora-Pelly. It came to my attention that today is the member's birthday, but exactly which birthday it is remains anybody's guess. He claims he's 39 but I have reason to doubt it.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, like a bottle of good wine, the Leader of the Opposition just gets better with age. And I ask all members to join with me in wishing him a very happy birthday and more to come.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Record Oil and Gas Land Sales

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Saskatchewan announced the details of *Partnership for Growth*, our economic development strategy, we identified oil and natural gas as a key growth sector for the provincial economy. Certainly it's an important part of the local economy in my own constituency of Lloydminster. Well, Mr. Speaker, the announcement last Thursday that Crown oil and natural gas land sale revenues for the first part of the year are more than double from the sales of last year shows that the strategy is working.

Of course sales of petroleum and natural gas rights do more than bring revenue to the provincial treasury. This record activity will bring important spin-offs in the form of jobs and economic growth. When you look around the city of Lloydminster, the benefits of this growth are obvious — 224 building permits issued in 1996, up from 169 in 1995. In 1996 construction increased by 56 per cent.

The Bi-Provincial upgrader was designed to process 4,600 barrels of heavy crude a day, but actual production is currently up to 60,000 barrels a day, and the refinery is processing about

150,000 barrels a day. Husky is the largest employer in the area with more than 700 people working for the company in the Lloydminster area. In fact except for Regina and Saskatoon, Lloydminster is the fastest growing urban area in Saskatchewan. Our *Partnership for Growth* is working in Lloydminster, Mr. Speaker, and it's working all across Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Good News on the Rafferty and Alameda Dams

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to update the Legislative Assembly on the success of the Rafferty and Alameda dams.

Mr. Speaker, both Rafferty and Alameda dam are doing a wonderful job in providing flood protection for south-eastern Saskatchewan and our friends from North Dakota, the governor of whom we met with today. I along with a couple of my caucus colleagues had the opportunity to get a firsthand look at just how quickly water is pouring into these important facilities. Rafferty was filled with ducks, geese, loons, and other wildlife, happily paddling along and preparing their nests.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you'll be relieved to know that none of these ducks, geese, loons, were found floating feet up, drowned from the rising waters. Mr. Speaker, because of the Rafferty and Alameda dams, ducks in south-east Saskatchewan have been reacquainted with their natural habitat, water.

But the wildlife aren't the only ones who appreciate the water in these dams, Mr. Speaker. People from all over the south-east are thankful to be protected from the devastating effects of floods brought to them in the past, that many are presently experiencing in other parts of the Prairies. Our prayers go out to those families along the Red River in North Dakota and Manitoba who are presently fighting the rages of that river.

But, Mr. Speaker, people in my constituency are offering prayers of thanks that their communities aren't suffering the same fate. Hopefully the members opposite can now set aside partisan politics and appreciate the outstanding contributions these structures are making to the province's south-east.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Pelleting Plant

Ms. Murrell: — Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that Saskatchewan rural residents have the ability, the innovation, and the determination to improve their communities through diversification. As part of the diversification that is occurring in the Wilkie area, Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention a new pelleting plant that is going to be built in the west-central region near Wilkie.

This proposed venture between 12 communities in the area will be designed to create a value added product from one which has traditionally been seen as a by-product of grain farming, grain screenings — the screenings, Mr. Speaker, that farmers are tired of paying freight rates on. Dockage that will now be a value

added commodity — high protein livestock feed.

And with further federal Liberal deregulation of the rail industry, Mr. Speaker, those freight charges will almost certainly increase. This new \$1.2 million pelleting plant will further enhance the economy of the west-central district.

Innovation, determination, and cooperation are assets that can describe the people of this province. This project is another example of Saskatchewan communities working together, and I want to wish well the West Central Pelleting Ltd. all the best in their new venture.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Memorial Curling Bonspiel

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to once again announce that this weekend in my home town of Ile-a-la-Crosse a curling bonspiel will be held for the second year in a row in memory of a great man, Raymond Daigneault, who passed away November of 1994.

Raymond was a great man. He not only touched my life through his guidance and friendship but he touched the many lives of Ile-a-la-Crosse people, and his contributions to Ile-a-la-Crosse and region will be never forgotten.

Raymond was a hard-working miner for 18 years but still made time for his family and friends. He was a father of four of his own children but he helped raise 10 foster children throughout his short lifetime.

The Raymond Daigneault Memorial Bonspiel is one way that Raymond's memory will live on in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Given his active involvement and love for sports of all kinds — hockey, softball, and curling, to name a few — I am sure Raymond is happy that his memory is being kept alive through such a fun social curling event and cabaret.

There are 30 teams that are entered this weekend, Mr. Speaker, and I want to commend the community of Ile-a-la-Crosse for their continued commitment and gesture of Raymond's memory.

I would ask the Assembly to join with me and recognize the accomplishments of my home town and that of Mr. Raymond Daigneault. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Broomball Teams in Odessa

Hon. Mr. Scott: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many times we talk of the rich traditions of this fine province and the community spirit that seems to encompass our rural communities. Well, Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about both of these very positive traits that help identify who we are and what this province is about.

For the past six years, a small community south-east of Regina has continuously demonstrated its community spirit and support

of their local sports teams. These sports teams, Mr. Speaker, are creating a tradition in that community — a tradition that everyone can be proud of.

The town I am referring to is Odessa. The sports teams are the junior boys and junior girls provincial champion broomball teams. This past weekend, these two teams were in Montreal to compete for the national titles. The boys team, the Odessa Bandits, placed fourth in the A side, just out of the medals, and the girls, the Odessa Flames, will be bringing home a bronze medal as souvenirs. This is the sixth consecutive year that Odessa has represented our province at the nationals.

Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the accomplishments of the Odessa community, and the efforts of its residents and team members. This community and its broomball teams are showing the rest of the country what people from rural Saskatchewan can do.

I congratulate the teams on their accomplishments and on their lengthy record. I also commend the efforts of the community of Odessa for the support and encouragement they have shown. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I have a very special guest, the Governor of North Dakota, in your chamber, in your gallery actually, and I wonder if I might ask leave of the House to introduce to him to you and the members of the Assembly.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank all hon. members.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly, a very special and distinguished guest — they actually are all very special and distinguished — but in particular the Governor of the state of North Dakota, Mr. Edward T. Schafer, who is seated in your gallery. Please, Governor Schafer, would you please stand?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Who is accompanied, Governor Schafer is, by his chief of staff, Ms. Carol Olson, and legal counsel, Mr. Bob Harms, who is not in the gallery, and of our protocol office, Ms. Ella Denzin.

I will not go into the details, in the interest of time, of the very distinguished career the Governor has already had, other than to say that he is really a native son of North Dakota, born and raised in Bismarck, mainly educated there, with some extra special education outside of North Dakota. He was first elected Governor of North Dakota in 1992 as a Republican Governor, and was re-elected for a second term in 1996, which I think is either the first time that feat has been done by any governor or

by a Republican governor. Either way, it really is quite an accolade for this person's acceptance in public life.

Governor Schafer is visiting us today on a very important matter, and that is the fifth international Williston basin horizontal well workshop, where myself and the Governor shared the stage in addressing members of the industry respecting the Williston basin.

This workshop, Mr. Speaker, very briefly, has attracted nearly 700 participants, one of the highest attendance rates of any oil and gas conferences anywhere, and it opens up the doors for many opportunities for North Dakota and for Saskatchewan and for the private sector.

I look forward to further meetings with the Governor this afternoon. He's telling me he's anxious to watch question period, so please, opposition members, be on your best behaviour today. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that he'll be meeting with you, sir, with the ministers of Energy and Mines, Agriculture and Food, and Highways and Transportation.

So once again, on behalf of all the members of the Legislative Assembly, please join me in welcoming our very distinguished guest, Governor Schafer of North Dakota, to this Assembly and to the province of Saskatchewan and Canada — Governor Schafer.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Leader of the Opposition granted leave?

Leave granted.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members. I'd like to, on behalf of the official opposition, I would like to add to the words of the Premier, a very sincere welcome, Governor Schafer, to the province, and to your staff as well. I hope that you enjoy your stay. A busy convention and a busy seminar and meeting many people I'm sure is going to give you a lot of ideas on the kind of communication that we have between our very close neighbours to the south, the states on the very top of the United States of America. We look forward to that continuing . . . continued dialogue. Welcome to Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Leader of the Third Party granted leave?

Leave granted.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We too as well in the PC (Progressive Conservative) opposition, would like to join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in welcoming Governor Schafer to Saskatchewan, as well as his chief of staff, Carol Olson, to Saskatchewan.

We very much enjoyed Governor Schafer's comments at noon, at the noon luncheon that we attended.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Governor Schafer is here at a bit of

a difficult time for his state, as large parts of the state are experiencing flooding conditions down in the state of North Dakota. And I would hope that the Premier would join with us in extending our thoughts on that flooding and our hopes that that'll soon be remedied. I hope as well that the Premier would want to join with me in extending our thoughts and hopes that the Rafferty-Alameda projects will provide some degree of flood protection for the city of Minot, as I'm sure it is doing.

And with that, I would like to just welcome again Governor Schafer. And I hope he has the opportunity to stop down at our office this afternoon. We got the right-sized sweatshirt for you this afternoon, sir, and we'll be able to give that to you today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

SaskTel's Performance

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of SaskTel has proved once again that while the phone may be ringing, nobody's home.

Last week a SaskTel executive indicated that the Crown company was looking at a possible increase in local phone rates. When questioned about these statements, the minister categorically stated that SaskTel is not contemplating hiking local phone rates. Yesterday when asked if she could rule out an increase in '97 the minister indicated, and I quote, "We can't rule out anything."

What is it, Madam Minister? Are you contemplating a local phone rate increase this year, yes or no? And will you give us an answer that you can stick with for more than four or five days.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question so often I'm not sure whether the lines are open. You know, the phone rings and there's nobody home.

We have said, Mr. Speaker, that we're always reviewing our rates. We are not at this time contemplating an increase in local rates. And based upon the financial results that were tabled in this House yesterday, I think that the members opposite would be able to understand the reason for that, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe, Mr. Speaker, if the minister would give us the same answer twice in a row we'd probably quit asking the question.

Mr. Speaker, I find it odd that when SaskTel records a profit such as it did with the LCL (Leicester Communications Limited) cable, there were glowing reports from the government. In fact SaskTel's '96 annual report goes on to speak about the deal at great length in spite of the fact that the sale of this investment took place in '95.

At the same time, the NST fiasco, which cost taxpayers of Saskatchewan \$16 million, received only one line in the '96

annual report. And even then it hardly goes into specifics, stating that, and I quote:

As a result of the increasing diversification opportunities elsewhere in the world, the corporation decided to conclude its involvement with NST Services in February of '97.

Will the minister explain why the '96 annual report contains such little information about the NST venture? Madam Minister, is it because you have something further to hide or is it merely because you're ashamed of your past performance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, one could hardly be anything but proud of the performance that was posted by our telephone company last year . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — . . . with a return on investment to the owners, the people of this province, that it showed.

And with respect to disclosure, Mr. Speaker, the member knows, having attended the Crown Corporations Committee hearings recently at which they didn't raise any questions about any of the investments, that the year under review, the year that these decisions are taken is 1997 where we are not required to disclose or discuss those results until 1998. We're a year early, Mr. Speaker. That's open and accountable government. That's open and accountable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know of too many private businesses that would be proud of blowing \$16 million.

Mr. Speaker, as members of this House are aware, a review of Saskatchewan's family of Crown corporations is not yet complete. However, the minister in charge of SaskTel has apparently already made up her mind that the Crown will not be privatized. When questioned about this issue by the media, the minister responded, and I quote: "Why would we want to think about this at this juncture?"

Will the minister explain if she has indeed ruled out privatization? And if so, why has this government wasted more than \$3 million for a review that is merely a public relations exercise?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to answer this question on behalf of the government because I'm prompted to do so by virtue of this Liberal opposition asking us, the government, to clarify our position on privatization when I note, Mr. Speaker, that on or about July 6, 1996 . . . I'm quoting now from the *Leader-Post*:

Liberal MLA Gerard Aldridge said the people he's talked with around the province say they don't want any

wholesale sell-off of their Crowns.

Then two weeks later, Mark Wyatt, quoting in the *Leader-Post*. We see now quoting the Leader of the Liberal Party, as he then was, Mr. Osika, as follows:

Osika said Friday the province is in desperate need of money and by selling off Crown assets, it could reduce its interest payments and put the proceeds toward health care.

And then, Mr. Speaker, to finish my answer. Just a few days ago the University of Saskatchewan Commerce students put out a mock budget which was premised on the privatization of SaskTel, SaskPower, SaskEnergy, and SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance), quote, "But Melenchuk (referring to the Liberal leader) applauded the budget (the fiscal conservatives on the budget)." He said, "I like it better than the provincial budget."

Talk about confusion — which is it? Where do the Liberals stand — for privatization or against it?

We stand for public enterprise in the province of Saskatchewan which is modern-day, efficient, and competitive in the 21st century. Where do you stand?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower's Performance

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

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now I've recognized the Leader of the Opposition and I can't hear him. And I'll ask all hon. members to allow the Leader of the Opposition to put his question.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know I am a year older and I will try to speak louder today.

Mr. Speaker, the 1996 annual report for SaskPower reports a \$139 million profit for the last fiscal year, an all-time record for the Crown corporation. Mr. Speaker, two years ago, Jack Messer, the minister in charge of SaskPower indicated that, and I quote:

If it's going to operate in the best interests of shareholders, it's going to have to generate something in the neighbourhood of \$150 million.

Mr. Messer appears to have forgotten that the shareholders of our Crown corporations are actually the taxpayers of Saskatchewan, and they are questioning why the Crown is being driven solely as a money generating source.

Will the minister explain why SaskPower has abandoned its primary responsibility to provide affordable, quality service to the people of this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

I would be more than pleased to answer that question. The fact of the matter is, as the member knows, this corporation did generate a \$139 million in profit, and I want to tell you how it did it. It did it by internal cost efficiencies and by the fact that we have strengthened the economy to the point where we're selling a lot more electricity.

With respect to the shareholders, the management of the Power Corporation clearly understand who the shareholders are, and that's the people of Saskatchewan. This corporation will be supplying a \$76 million dividend to the shareholders, the million people of this province.

It's been responsible for paying down \$124 million of the provincial debt. And you want to sell it off? I say shame on you, Mr. Member.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of SaskPower has brushed aside suggestions that the residents of this province are being gouged. As a means of cutting costs, Jack Messer took his axe to the RUD (rural underground distribution) program. He axed about 200 employees, many of whom provided front-line service to rural Saskatchewan. And there's still the possibility that we will have dozens of rural SaskPower offices closing.

At the same time, the Saskatchewan people were also on the receiving end of a 12 per cent increase last year, and a new monthly reconstruction charge, all of which helped the company increase its profits by some \$36 million.

As astounding as this may seem, Mr. Messer maintains that there is no connection between these increases and increased profits. Will the minister explain how he can possibly support the position of Mr. Messer.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that on behalf of this government we are very proud of the job that the people of that corporation and other Crown corporations have done on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member opposite if he feels through privatization that we could see a reduction of the provincial debt on an annual basis of \$124 million? Could you see dividends of \$76 million?

I say to you, Mr. Member, this government has been responsible with the management of these Crown corporations. They will continue to serve the shareholders, the people of Saskatchewan, in their best interests.

And I want to add that if you look at the envelope of utility costs, we are among the lowest in Canada with respect to telephones, insurance, with power, and energy. I want to remind the member that SaskEnergy, in case he might ask, was responsible for a decrease in rates of almost 12 per cent in the last two years.

I say to the member opposite, open your eyes; quit playing

politics, and act on behalf of the interests of the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan who consider that the fact that the RUD program has been cancelled, is discriminatory, and in fact \$40 million of potential savings has now gone into profits. There is discrimination against people in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

In the private sector it is not uncommon for chief executive officers to have bonus clauses written into their contract based on the financial performance of their companies. Given the fact that some of Saskatchewan's Crown corporations are reporting massive profits, and they now appear to be more profit-driven than ever, one has to question if the same kind of provisions are built into Crown corporations executive contracts.

Will the minister explain if such provisions exist in any contracts of our Crown executives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Minister, the answer is no, but let me describe to the member the way he can find out for himself. It's available through the freedom of information. The contracts are tabled every year, and any time there's a change, by every CEO (chief executive officer) in this province. And if that member, if that member and his caucus had made the decision, instead of hiring the Leader of the Liberal Party to do their research, to hire a qualified researcher to act on behalf of the opposition, they might be a much more capable entity. In this legislature you're becoming a laughing-stock, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. Do your research, then come in here and ask the question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the Leader of the Opposition is done, I'll take over. Just, Mr. Speaker, just when I thought and when I imagine the Premier hoped Jack Messer was done saying stupid things, Jack's gone ahead and really outdone himself. Now he's telling us there's no connection between record high power rates and record SaskPower profits.

If there's no connection between power rates and profits, why doesn't he cut the rates? In fact why doesn't he just give it away? The fact is SaskPower's record profits are due to record high rates and everyone knows it.

My question is to the minister responsible for SaskPower. Mr. Minister, when are you going to see and pay more attention to the families of Saskatchewan rather than your family of Crown corporations? When are we going to see some reductions from SaskPower to the people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased

to respond to the member's question, but I want to begin by referring to some comments he made in the media the other night. He began by saying the \$139 million profit is a gouge of the taxpayers of this province. Isn't that what you said? That's exactly what you said, Mr. Member. And then right shortly after you said, and a 1 per cent return on investment is simply inadequate.

I say to that member, you know what we're doing, we're taking \$124 million to pay down a debt that you were responsible for. We're paying \$17 million a week that you and the former administration were responsible for, and I want to tell you how this has happened.

It's happened because of the people who work in these Crown corporations. It's happened because of competent management within those Crown corporations, something which you were never able to achieve or attain in the whole decade that you and your PC caucus governed this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskEnergy's Performance

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, SaskPower is not the only Crown corporation that's gouging consumers. SaskEnergy's profits were up by \$15 million, so does SaskEnergy respond by cutting rates? No, in fact SaskEnergy is trying to gouge consumers even more by asking for a rate increase.

My question again is to the minister responsible for SaskEnergy. Mr. Minister, in light of SaskEnergy's increased profit levels over last year, will you announce that you are rejecting SaskEnergy's request for a rate hike, and demand SaskEnergy present another proposal, this time calling for a further rate reduction?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let me respond with respect to the profits that SaskEnergy made. If the member would get up in the morning during 40 below weather, read his thermometer, he would then understand why he adjusts his thermostat, why he consumes more gas, which is what every person in this province did. That's what's responsible for the increased bottom line of the corporation.

And if the member was being honest with the people of Saskatchewan, he would share with them the fact that SaskEnergy, over the last two years, has decreased natural energy costs in this province by 11.6 per cent, which delivers the lowest — the lowest — natural gas rates in Canada. So be honest.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Jack Messer may have a monopoly on power in this province, but he certainly doesn't have a monopoly on stupid comments. The chief financial officer for SaskTel says he found an amazing thing out — if you reduce the price of long-distance calls in

Saskatchewan that drives up demand. This guy is the chief financial officer for SaskTel and he thinks it's amazing that cutting prices increases sales — unbelievable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for years the NDP have told us privately owned companies would gouge consumers. But it's SaskEnergy and SaskPower who are really doing the gouging in this province. While SaskTel rates may have dropped because of competition from outside private companies, this proves that before competition SaskTel was as well gouging the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) do anything to bring about competition in areas like power and natural gas so we can start seeing lower rates just like we've seen in SaskTel?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wiens: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems not to be listening to the answers that the individual Crowns are giving. The Crown corporations in Saskatchewan have served Saskatchewan well as was testified to by the people of Saskatchewan in the Crown review this summer. This report indicates how well . . . and how each of them has dealt with their own competitive circumstances and delivered efficient service delivery, amongst the lowest rates in Canada, and delivered profits accordingly, to begin to improve the rate of return on those corporations, having been undermined by the Tories opposite for 10 years.

We should be proud of these institutions, and we will continue to work with them as the shareholders want us to to have them adapting to the change that's necessary in the market-place and they will continue to be the best in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskTel's Failed United States Venture

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the minister responsible for SaskTel.

Madam Minister, we can now clearly see how far you are prepared to go to cover up the fiasco with NST. And your answers to the member from the opposition party is not good enough for us. We expect more.

You put out a 44-page annual report, Madam Minister, with page after page of financial statements of glowing rhetoric about how great SaskTel is doing. There is exactly one line, one sentence, about NST which tells us that you had time to put that in. You knew in time to put that report together that this was going to be a problem, so you put something in. You had lots of time.

You said in there . . . it says:

As a result of the increasing diversification opportunities elsewhere in the world, the corporation decided to conclude its involvement in NST Network Services in February, 1997.

No mention that the company folded up like a cheap lawn chair, Madam Minister. No mention that you ripped off the Saskatchewan telephone users by \$16 million. Madam Minister, clearly you were trying to cover up this disaster and it was only

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order. The hon. member has been extremely lengthy in his preamble and I'll ask him to go directly to his question.

Mr. Goohsen: — Madam Minister, will you admit that this was a cover-up. Will you admit today that you intentionally deceived the people of Saskatchewan. Will you give us a decent answer, one that's honest?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, in the interests of open and honest government, we put a statement in black and white, or whatever colour the page is, in the annual statement. This is hardly covering up, Mr. Speaker.

I've answered this question before as well. I feel a little bit like Lily Tomlin, like, have I reached the party to whom I am speaking, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — I've got a question for the minister of SaskTel, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it looks like SaskTel's approach in this matter is a simple approach — screw it up, cover it up, and then ask the taxpayers to cough it up.

Madam Minister, if the CEO of any private company in this province or any place else botched up a deal this badly for the shareholders, they would be demanding that person's head. Yet you have treated this thing as though it is a minor oversight.

And the one line that there is in this annual report about the NST is not even true, Madam Minister. It says you concluded your involvement because of increasing diversification opportunities elsewhere in the world.

Madam Minister, you ran this company into the debt of \$16 million. It had nothing to do with what was going on in the rest of the world. Your increasing diversification opportunities in the rest of the world were not there, and that's a total fiasco.

Madam Minister, when will you accept the responsibility for your department? When will you resign?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, never.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I want to point out again that this is part of a diversified investment portfolio which has been successful to the tune of \$300 million. If no risks were ever taken, Mr. Speaker, we wouldn't have had that kind of a gain. So some you lose, some you win.

But we are paying now \$17 million a week, each and every week, interest on the debt that was accumulated through the

fiascos that took place during the decade that that party governed this province, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gaming Revenue Sharing

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister responsible for Gaming. Mr. Speaker, now we know why the NDP isn't too worried about the falling profits at the casino in Regina. Only the NDP would make an agreement that includes a success tax, penalizing FSIN (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) for making money while rewarding themselves for losing money. It's too bad you didn't have a clause like this in your NST deal. SaskTel would be making millions on that operation.

Now the Gaming minister is admitting there was no scientific formula for the \$40 million possible profits that they hoped to get in two years. That's quite a way to run a business, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Minister, what are you doing about your so-called flip clause that rewards you for losing money, while penalizing Indian-run casinos for making money?

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer the question today. And I want to first of all indicate to the member opposite that in Saskatchewan we have probably one of the most, not probably but we have one of the most comprehensive gaming casinos agreement anywhere in Canada, to start with.

And the arrangement that we have with the first nations people, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that we have equity within the system. And currently what we have, Mr. Speaker, is we've arranged to have further discussions with our first nations people in respect to the particular issue that the member alludes to today.

But I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, because the member opposite needs to decide where he wants to be. First of all he talks about not being in gaming at all. Then he tells us we should be getting out of gaming.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, about a year ago, we had a number of bus tours who were coming to Saskatchewan from the United States, who were stopping in, stopping in the town of Carlyle, and you get up in this House and you tell us about how important that particular industry is to Saskatchewan. Where are you in terms of the gaming agreement, Mr. Speaker? Where are you?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Domestic Abuse Policies

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan have heard this government's claims that it is doing everything within its power to address social issues. However one prevailing, destructive, and very shameful issue, that of domestic violence, continues to be minimized by this government.

The Minister of Justice has indicated that his department is consulting with various women's groups across the province to determine an appropriate spousal abuse policy. However officials at Saskatoon's Family Support Centre, people who deal with battered women on a daily basis, have not been contacted for input nor are they aware of any other related organization that has been in contact with the Justice department regarding this matter.

Will the Minister of Justice explain which groups his department is consulting with and will he explain when battered women can expect some tangible results?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I can assure that member that consultations are happening continually with people in the field of prevention of violence against women, violence against children, violence in our homes. When she speaks of the family . . . (inaudible) . . . I know that she knows. There has been a long process of consultation over the last number of months with a group very closely associated with the family support centre. I have only recently just received their report, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when members of the Liberal caucus stand up in this House — and I don't care which one of them it is — and talk about human services in the province, I wish they would turn their attention to their federal counterparts, Mr. Speaker. Now they roll their heads over. Well I'll tell you they should roll their heads in shame, Mr. Speaker, in shame.

Let's take for example an institution in our province that has direct, direct impact on families and family violence. I speak of the Mobile Crisis centre in Saskatoon. Mobile Crisis in Saskatoon is threatened with closure. Why, Mr. Speaker? Not because we've changed our funding; in fact we've continued to support the Mobile Crisis centre. It's threatened with closure because of cuts by the federal Liberal government, and this caucus remains silent, Mr. Speaker. Every one of them remains silent and that's a shame, Mr. Speaker; that's a shame.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Toth: — Before orders of the day, to move a motion to substitute members on committee.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Cannington:

That the name of Mr. Ben Heppner be substituted for that of Mr. Dan D'Autremont on the list of members composing the Crown Corporations Committee.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — And before orders of the day, I wish to table, pursuant to section 14 of The Provincial Auditor Act, the report of the Provincial Auditor on the financial statements of crown agencies for years ending . . . the fiscal year ended March 31, 1996. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 2 — Reducing Child Poverty

Ms. Murray: — Thank you, thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to spend some time talking about the initiatives that our government has done to reduce child poverty in this province.

Now I'm looking forward to what my colleagues will have to say on this issue, and at the end of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move the following motion:

That this Assembly applaud the government's commitment to reducing child poverty, including the national leadership shown by our Premier on the development of a national child benefit, and the recent doubling of funding for Saskatchewan's award-winning action plan for children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I think we would all agree that it is a tragedy that in a province as rich in resources as Saskatchewan, and in a country as rich in resources as Canada, that we have children who live in poverty.

Now we have to work together as governments at all levels, and as communities, to eliminate child poverty. When we first took power, when we first were elected as a government in 1991, we had a lot of difficult choices that we had to make, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The Chair is having some difficulty being able to hear the hon. member make her remarks, and I'll ask the House to come to order and allow the hon. member for Regina Qu'Appelle to participate in the debate in an uninterrupted way.

Ms. Murray: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, when we were elected in 1991, we were faced with a situation which meant we had to make a lot of difficult and a lot of tough choices. And all of us in this Chamber will remember what those choices were.

But what we decided to do as a government was, we decided to target our scarce resources to the things that mattered to us — to families and to children. So not once since 1991 — not once — have we cut funding to social services. Not once. We have told the people of this province that we value children and we value families, and what we have done is we've targeted our

money to introduce programs which will support and which will help children and families.

Now we can't deal with the issue of poverty in isolation. It has to be dealt with as a community. Now we've given priorities to children and to families and we as colleagues have all supported that and we've recognized how important it is, but we're not actually the only . . . it's not just the people in this Chamber, but it's also people outside this Chamber, and people in the province of Saskatchewan who have also appreciated and recognized what we've done.

And what I'd like to do, Mr. Speaker, is just quote from an article by one Dale Eisler in an article he wrote in the *Davidson Leader*, and this is what he says:

Moreover, if you look at the last five years, the one consistent pattern between Romanow's government has been an approach where the weakest and most vulnerable were spared from the cuts in spending needed to bring financial stability back to the government. Unlike Ralph Klein's Alberta, where people on welfare have been forced to take less, or given one-way bus tickets out of the province as part of the fight against the deficit, there has been no such treatment of the poor in Saskatchewan on the way to a balanced budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, something that this government has done of which I am very proud and of which I know all my colleagues are very proud, is we've introduced the child action plan. Now we did this beginning in 1993, and we took a leadership role and did something which was really very creative and very innovative. Because what we did was, we went out and talked to people in the communities and talked to people who work with children and with families and said, now what can we do, what are some of the things that we can do to address this issue of poverty, especially child poverty, which concerns us all?

So what happened, Mr. Speaker, was that we came up with the child action plan. And this is a prevention plan and an early intervention plan, and it supports the idea that if you want productive and healthy members of society you have to start working with children. Many of us here will know Dr. Mustard and this is something that he puts forward as being crucial to developing a healthy and productive and valued society, is you have to look after your children.

So what this action plan does, Mr. Speaker, is, what this action plan does is look at ways in which we can support children and families. And we've done that, we've done that in many ways. We pioneered this program in 1993 and one of the first things we did was we appointed a Children's Advocate. Now no province has ever done that before. And this Children's Advocate does not report to the government but she reports directly to this Chamber, Mr. Speaker.

Now one of the other things we did was we established a volunteer council, an advisory council on children, and this group is composed of 25 people, volunteers throughout the province, who report to the various ministers on initiatives that can be taken to deal with this issue of poverty. Now it's not just one . . . it's not just the Minister of Social Services who's

involved in the children's action plan. There are several departments and secretariats and community groups that are involved.

One of the other things we did which I think is very important, is we established integrated school link services. So in other words, we used the existing facility of the school to look at how we can support families and children in need. So we have established lunch programs for instance, and we've established programs for young teen mothers. And these are all . . . It seems a very smart way to me, Mr. Speaker, to do it this way because we have existing facilities, and rather than creating new ones, we just used what's already there. So we're using the school program that's there.

Now one of the new initiatives in the child action plan is a northern housing initiative. And this provides for funding for people in the North so that they too can work towards having comfortable and warm family homes.

An Hon. Member: — Just like anybody should.

Ms. Murray: — Just like anybody should, absolutely.

I've already talked about hot lunch programs which are done through the school but there has also been more money set aside — I think \$500,000 — for nutrition programs in the latest budget initiative.

Now one of the other things that we've done in this budget, Mr. Speaker, is we started a street youth initiative. And this is in several cities and centres in Regina, including Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Yorkton, and Regina. And this is dealing with young people who find themselves on the street for a variety of reasons; and giving them a point of contact with people who work with young people so that they begin to appreciate that they're valued members of society, and that there are other options for them, other than going to the street.

One of the other initiatives of the child action plan is of course the whole concept of community schools. And we certainly heard about some of the initiatives in Prince Albert and in Regina where it's not just the teachers who are involved with the schools, but it's the communities as well. The parents are brought into the decision-making process — there's a parents' advisory council. And it's just made the whole school more of a community, which I think is very important to not just the teachers and the students in the school but the community itself.

Now because of the work that's been done in this province by the child action plan, and because this plan is recognized nationally, even internationally, and because of the leadership role that our Premier has played in this plan, our Premier has been recognized and given a Champions for Children Award in Ottawa.

(1430)

Now this is a great honour, Mr. Speaker, and one I think that we should all be very proud of; as we are very proud of our Premier and the initiatives that he's shown. This award was only presented to four recipients and only one of them was a

province and that was the province of Saskatchewan. So we're very proud of our Premier and of the departments that have worked together to make this action plan such a success.

Now because this action plan is so important to our government, in this budget that we just introduced in March, we have doubled — over doubled — the funding for the child's action plan, which I think gives a very, very clear message that this is all very important for us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murray: — The things that we have to remember about the community . . . about the action plan for children, Mr. Speaker, is that it must be community based, government has to be seen to have a leadership and facilitating role, and also that all these programs have to help families in the long term.

Now, Mr. Speaker, actually the one other thing that I wanted to say about the child action plan was that in the Children's Advocate annual report she actually makes very positive comments about the child action plan. And I'd like to just read those to my colleagues in the House:

Government, in Saskatchewan, has implemented a well recognized and highly respected Child Action Plan. Community advocates are being supported in their efforts to ensure that children are valued and protected through the provision of Prevention and Support Grants and other initiatives. There seems to be a sincere effort being made by politicians and community members to respect children, youth and families.

And we're very proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

Now I'd like to just get back for a moment to the leadership that our Premier has shown by promoting and talking about the establishment of national social programs. Now this is very important when it comes to protecting children and ensuring that all their needs are met.

Now when the Premier has been speaking at conferences across Canada and meeting with other first ministers, he's been promoting the idea of a national child benefit. And I think initially when this was promoted I'm not sure that people were paying the attention that they should have been paying to this, but he continued to do this and he continued to keep this on the agenda. And it's very gratifying to know, Mr. Speaker, that in January of this year when the first ministers and the ministers of Social Services met they agreed to establish a national child benefit.

Now this is the first time in 30 years that both levels of government have agreed and developed a new, universal social program.

Now the sad part about this, Mr. Speaker, is that the federal Liberal government has decided that they're not going to provide any funding for this until July, 1998. Now that's a long time. That's a long time. It's all very well to talk about it, but our government in its budget has not only talked about it but has put actions with their words.

So what we've done, Mr. Speaker, is we've provided some transitional funding as a bridge. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to say and very pleased to say that this government, this Saskatchewan government, values families, it values children, and it continues to develop more and more effective programs to support and protect them.

And actually there is another quote here by our Premier that I would like to just read into the record, and the Premier says:

This is just the beginning. The greatest rewards of this integrated, community-based approach, the greatest rewards are yet to come as those children grow and take their place in our community.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to move this motion, seconded by my good friend, the member from Battleford-Cut Knife:

That this Assembly applaud the government's commitment to reducing child poverty, including the national leadership shown by our Premier on the development of a national child benefit and the recent doubling of funding for Saskatchewan's award-winning action plan for children.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Murrell: — The child dressed in a threadbare winter jacket, holes in his runner, and no mittens arrives at school hungry and cold. A playmate offends him, and in anger he strikes out. The teacher intervenes. The child sullenly begins to talk about his problem. His mother went to work early and he could not find anything for his breakfast nor for his sister's. The mother works part time and depends on Social Services and the food bank to subsidize their income.

This is not the family of Tim Cratchit, Mr. Speaker. This is Saskatchewan, this is Canada, this is reality and this is poverty. Mr. Speaker, one out of every five children live in poverty. This is one of the greatest social challenges facing Canadians in the 21st century.

Research shows that long-term poverty contributes to a number of lifelong disadvantages — poor education and life skills, poor health, poor employment prospects, and family problems. Problems of frustration, depression, hopelessness. Problems of dependency on social and health programs. Problems with violence.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of increased poverty to society can be huge. This issue needs to be addressed now. And the Saskatchewan government recognizes this and is leading the way. This government is investing in people, in our children, in our future, by providing 13 million more in benefits and services for Saskatchewan children, youth, and families this year.

The Saskatchewan's action plan for children funding continues to increase, enabling programs and services to develop and expand, addressing concerns and issues in our communities.

Programs that provide our children with a positive lifestyle. Community agencies and schools who receive funding for nutrition programs, particularly in the North. Funding towards an immunization program to protect children against hepatitis A infection. Funding for another Children's Advocate office on behalf of children who receive provincial government services. Funding to help kindergarten children with aggressive or anti-social behaviours.

We are expanding our teen and young parents programs to vulnerable parents, particularly in rural areas. Last year my constituency of Battleford-Cut Knife received prevention support grants to fund the Battlefords Interval House project addressing family violence; the Cut Knife High School drinking and driving awareness project; the summer drop-in program for youth 12 to 18 living in Unity and area; the Battlefords concern-for-youth project to host mini-workshops on teen alcohol, drug use, and teen pregnancy. All innovative projects that are forward looking.

For the past 5 years selected residents from the former North Battleford youth cottage have attended a developmental camp on the Poundmaker Reserve. Sweetgrass also has a provincially managed young offenders facility. And I wish to acknowledge the initiatives to teach youth about their cultures, their values, and their respect, basic life skills, and to develop meaningful relationships with elders and members of the community. Rates were increased for foster parents as we recognize the extremely important role that they play by caring for our Saskatchewan children and our young people.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives are a start to address the problems that our youth encounter on a daily basis. But we recognize and acknowledge that more must be done. This problem did not begin yesterday, nor will it be solved today, but it's a start. Our Premier has been recognized nationally, receiving on behalf of our province, the Champions for Children Award for the development and the implementation of Saskatchewan's action plan for children.

This year we are implementing initiatives which support and encourage low income families, assistance to allow them to provide meaningful benefits to their families. With our community partners, we are meeting the diverse challenges and coordinating effective solutions.

Saskatchewan Justice, Social Services, and the police delivered training to more than 780 police and first-responders, increasing their awareness about child sexual abuse allegations. Justice also increased the funding for more RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) in the rural areas. Saskatchewan Health and Social Services directed resources to develop and implement a three-year pilot project for an adolescents sex offenders' treatment service in two communities.

Social Services targeted \$106,000 for community-driven pilot projects to require non-violent young offenders to face their community, their victim, and their family, and to take direct responsibility for their actions.

Mr. Speaker, being dependent on Social Services is a continuing cycle. We all have dreams and goals. We all want to be warm and not hungry. We all want to be secure. And in order

to achieve these goals, we must continue to strive to provide protection to our vulnerable. We must continue to provide a good education, not only to our children but to their parents, so that they can be employed. And we must continue to work with our partners to have effective, community-based programs that will provide positive solutions.

We cannot do it alone. And in order for us to implement and deliver these solutions we must also have federal support — support financially to enhance the lives of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close my remarks with this: the seeds of today and yesterday are the flowers of tomorrow. A Chinese proverb that reflects the initiatives we have begun and encourages us to continue with hope for a better future for all.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to second the motion by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, first off I would like to say that I am extremely surprised that the members opposite would put forward this motion for debate when it highlights a glaring broken promise made by the Premier. Back in 1990 when the Premier had his sights set on government, he pledged to eliminate child poverty in his first term in office.

If his government had diligently worked to keep that promise, had taken meaningful, concrete actions, we would not be standing in this House today debating the government's effort to reducing child poverty because, theoretically, child poverty would be wiped out in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — It is for this reason that I will be introducing an amendment to this motion after elaborating on a few of my thoughts on this issue.

Now I'm not making light, Mr. Speaker, of some of the work that is being done to reduce child poverty. Because I do believe that child poverty is one of the worst injustices in this world. We all must do what we can to improve the situation.

It is tragic to know that thousands of Saskatchewan children are worried about where their next meal will come from in this province. And these children are suffering through no fault of their own. Children are some of the most vulnerable members of society.

As elected officials, I truly do believe that we all must work together to make this province the best place for them to live. Unfortunately, that is certainly not the case right now. According to the most recent figures, Saskatchewan has the fourth worst child poverty rate in Canada. As recently as 1995, our child poverty rate stood at 21.6 per cent. Now that is simply not acceptable, and not acceptable for a government that determines it's going to be working hard on child poverty.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, that means that over 57,000 Saskatchewan children are possibly suffering from hunger, lack of proper clothing or shelter, and many are also afflicted with a wide range of social problems that are often linked with depressed economic conditions. These children must not be further victimized by ill-thought-out election promises that are casually tossed aside by this government. But we all know that keeping election promises is not this NDP government's strong point.

In October of 1991 the now Minister of Education pledged, and I quote: "If elected, the New Democratic Party will work to get rid of food banks." Now any of the members opposite who need to refresh their memory can refer to that quote in the October 3 issue of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*.

But here we are in 1997, when the issue of food banks is steadily increasing, and it follows a trend that was established since this NDP government first came to power in 1991. Right now there are 10 food banks operating throughout Saskatchewan. There are food banks, underground food banks, that are operating throughout rural Saskatchewan. The use of food banks was a problem which the NDP so conveniently hollered about in the late '80s and in early 1990s, and now the use of food banks is at its most shocking level ever in Saskatchewan.

The problem of child poverty is not restricted to any one region in Saskatchewan, and it's not restricted to urban areas, and it's not restricted to rural areas. Children are common clients at food banks in Saskatoon, Regina, Biggar, Melfort, Manor, Melville, Moose Jaw, Outlook, and Prince Albert.

Statistics we receive from the Regina and Saskatoon food banks show that about half of the clients using these services were children. Every day hundreds of children across Saskatchewan are forced to rely on the generosity of others in order to eat. The sheer numbers of children who are relying on food bank services point to a blatant failure in economic and social development policy by this NDP government.

Poverty, Mr. Speaker, is not simply a physical state. Poverty affects the bodies and minds of these children. Study after study shows that the level of nutrition children receive directly affect their performance in school. Children living in poverty often find it extremely difficult to focus on their studies, not to mention the social challenges that they face trying to fit in with their classmates.

Dozens of community groups across this province of ours, across Saskatchewan, are helping these children by offering localized lunch programs — that is true. But the Canadian and Saskatchewan School Trustees Association point out the need to recognize and work towards province-wide school nutrition programs. They have submitted many, many proposals, many recommendations and ideas. Yet the government seems to think a few localized school programs will replace them . . . or rather will place them in good political standing. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, children in many schools throughout this province suffer from hunger and are in need of support.

So there it sits. I am extremely frustrated by this government's

lack of action on several issues that directly impact children. On one hand, the ministers of Social Services, Justice, and Education are constantly asking for better suggestions from the community and from us, the Liberal opposition members. But when we do submit tangible suggestions, this government's common response is no response at all.

Case in point, Mr. Speaker, the tragic problem of child prostitution. Many of the children that are selling their bodies on the streets are also subject to impoverished conditions at home and they are often physically, emotionally, and sexually abused.

Now I have asked the minister to help change social services, justice, and health systems so that these child prostitutes are treated as the victims of pedophiles. To his credit, the minister did agree that child prostitution is a serious problem that must be looked at. And he agreed that child prostitutes are indeed victims, not criminals.

But that is where his help ends. At this point it is nothing more than lip-service. I raised this issue several times last session and I have pursued it even further this session. Through my private member's Bill I have introduced some concrete suggestions for the government to help combat child prostitution. I introduced that Bill weeks ago and still have yet to get a concrete response from the minister.

If you won't accept my proposals or the dozens of proposals you have received from community groups across Saskatchewan, then it's about high time that you offered a real plan of your own in this regard. One of the reasons that so many children in Saskatchewan are suffering from child prostitution and poverty is because of lack of leadership by the government. This is not something on which to be commended. This is not something to praise.

Mr. Speaker, the government's lack of action on these important issues is something of which the members opposite should be ashamed. I am bitterly disappointed in this government's unwillingness to take swift action on the child prostitution issue. If the children of Saskatchewan are forced to wait seven more years for legislative changes concerning the treatment of child prostitutes, more young lives will needlessly be lost. These children have nowhere else to turn and we as elected officials need to provide some solid leadership in effecting positive change for them.

The communities out there are doing their part. I've offered my legislation and I really, really would like to know when the minister and this government will do their part. I fear another seven-year wait on this issue because that is exactly how long it's taken this government to make any real movement on the issue of child poverty.

Mr. Speaker, I offer this quote contained in the most recent report submitted by Saskatchewan Children's Advocate. In bold print on page 3 she says, and I quote:

We cannot afford to delay our responses to our children — they have only one childhood and that childhood is expiring day by day.

Now I'll repeat that once again for the NDP members opposite:

We cannot afford to delay our responses to our children — they have only one childhood and that childhood . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. Now . . . Order, order. The Chair does not need advice from either side of the House. And I'll ask all hon. members . . . all hon. members will know that it's not appropriate to be shouting across the floor, and I'll ask all members to provide the opportunity for the hon. member for Humboldt to continue with debate.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the children of Saskatchewan need real and significant, tangible, concrete, immediate action on child prostitution and poverty.

What is also disturbing to me is the way this NDP government uses empty propaganda to try and give the appearance that it's looking out for the best interests of our children. Mr. Speaker, the very people suffering from poverty the most are also the ones suffering from policies implemented by this very government.

Many people living below the poverty line are the same ones who are receiving aid from social assistance. The minister himself told me that in 1996-97, there are nearly 81,000 people living on social assistance. As for a snapshot of who exactly these recipients are, the most recent figures available are from February of 1997, which shows that nearly 35,000 of social service recipients are children. It's a sad fact that 43.6 per cent of social service case-loads in February was made up of children, children that oftentimes, besides that, Mr. Speaker, don't seem to get a cheque on time from the department.

It is also no coincidence, Mr. Speaker, that single parents represent 15 per cent of social assistance recipients. That means that over 12,000 single parents in Saskatchewan rely on some type of government assistance. Most of these people are looking to the government for assistance because they have no other alternative. Many of these people have abandoned the labour market because they have been shut out of any opportunity to earn their own income.

The high number of social assistance recipients in Saskatchewan is directly related to this government's failure to achieve its job creation targets. This, Mr. Speaker, is another broken promise. Once again we see how Saskatchewan children are suffering as a direct result of another broken government promise.

If this government were truly committed to real and effective job creation, it would be boasting about increasing the labour market. This government desperately needs to create a provincial environment that will encourage industry and private business to create thousands of new, full-time, permanent jobs. Only then will we have true economic growth and a reduction in child poverty.

Statistics Canada and reports by Saskatchewan's Women's Secretariat show that Saskatchewan women and children are suffering from depressed labour market conditions.

The statistics show that 70 per cent of all part-time jobs are held by women. In fact 30 per cent of all women who are in the labour force work part time. The number one reason that these women work part time is because they cannot find full-time work. Thousands of single mothers across Saskatchewan are really struggling to properly provide for their children because they are stuck in low wage and part-time jobs.

Mr. Speaker, another frequent concern I have heard from single parents who are receiving social assistance is that they are having additional deductions on their income support payments. This provincial government is imposing a wage deduction related to the federal child tax benefit. When these clients asked Social Services officials about the provincial deduction on their federal benefit, Social Service officials told them it's to offset the old baby bonus allocation. When I questioned the Minister of Social Services about this practice during estimates, I still did not receive a satisfactory answer.

The facts here are simple. The provincial government is penalizing Saskatchewan social service recipients for receiving federal child tax benefits. Now as one woman told me:

I just can't understand that. Because of the funding the federal government is providing for my children, the provincial government is taking more money away from my total income support payment. So where is the government's compassion here?

That's a good question, Mr. Speaker. Where is the government's compassion? She went on to say, this woman went on to say that "The people who are really suffering from the NDP's shell game are my children."

I received several calls relating to the same complaint. How can the provincial government penalize people by way of wage deductions because of federal funding that is provided for their children? The child tax benefit from the feds is not a wage, and nor should it be considered one. It seems, Mr. Speaker, that the federal Liberals giveth and the province's NDP taketh away. Perhaps this is the question that's something the members opposite should carefully consider and ask their Premier.

The recent report by the Children's Advocate also points out some glaring failures of this government's policies as they relate to children and the depressed economic conditions in which many of these children live.

Data compiled by the Children's Advocate shows that more and more children are reaching out to her for help because they are having problems with this government's policies.

In 1995 about 5 per cent of the calls received by Children's Advocate were directly from children. That number grew to about 20 per cent in 1996. Also, the total number of files opened by the Children's Advocate last year was 502. That's up from 477 in 1995. That increased number is undoubtedly partly due to increased awareness about the Children's Advocate office, but the high numbers also point to some serious problems with the Social Services, Education, Justice, and Health departments as they relate to children.

I do believe that the Children's Advocate is doing some outstanding work, but she has commented several times in her report that she is somewhat frustrated with the slow process of legislative changes on matters that directly relate to the interests of children. When the Minister of Social Services proudly quoted from the advocate's report last week in question period, he conveniently skipped over the quote on page 23 that says:

Government officials are themselves frustrated by delayed resolution to issues that impact on children and their families.

However when I suggested that the minister apply a section of The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act that would help set up an all-party committee to deal with matters related to troubled youth, the minister sloughed it off. He constantly invites us to work with him in order to improve programs for Saskatchewan's children, yet when I and others make important suggestions, he does not want to listen.

(1500)

Now this arrogance is at the expense of Saskatchewan people and, more profoundly, at the expense of Saskatchewan children. Of course we do appreciate any sincere effort that the government is now making in helping our federal counterparts develop and implement a beneficial and effective national program related to child benefits. There is absolutely no reason that children should go hungry in a province that is as developed as Saskatchewan, or supposed to be as developed as Saskatchewan.

But the minister and his counterparts must not stop here. He must begin to listen and to seriously consider the concerns, suggestions, and even detailed proposals that community leaders, other governments, and the children are making regarding all government policies that directly affect the lives of Saskatchewan children.

This issue of child poverty, child prostitution, and other abuses of children are not pleasant to think about. It is not pleasant to think about Saskatchewan children who are suffering. But while this government seems to talk a lot about what should be done, myself and the people of Saskatchewan are equally interested to know when improvements will be done.

Mr. Speaker, the inaction of this government in the area of child poverty is nothing short of a travesty. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move an amendment to this motion, seconded by the member from Athabasca. The amendment will read as follows, Mr. Speaker:

All the words after "Assembly" be deleted and replaced with:

"condemn the government's failure to fulfil its promise to eliminate child poverty."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. There'll be plenty of opportunity to engage in debate. Order. Not while the

Speaker is in the Chair . . . or on his feet.

I find the amendment in order and debate will continue.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to enter into this debate and I do so on behalf of the children of our province, especially those children who don't have warm clothes to wear in the winter or those who often get out of bed hungry in the morning and return to bed at night still hungry.

Mr. Speaker, one child living in poverty in our province is too many. And in Saskatchewan we have a whole lot more than one child in poverty; we have thousands of them. According to the latest statistics available to us, 21.6 per cent of Saskatchewan children live below the poverty line. That's 57,000 children, Mr. Speaker. Is that a record we should be applauding? I don't think so. It's a record the members opposite should be ashamed of.

Mr. Speaker, the government wants us to slap their leader on the back for working towards a national child benefit, and we are thankful to the federal government for implementing such a plan. It's a very real commitment they've shown, and it's a start. I'm not surprised the members opposite want to steal some of the credit that those actually belongs to, because progress in the area of reducing child poverty is certainly not something this provincial government deserves any credit for whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the other members opposite are very good at making all kinds of promises when it comes to child poverty. But just as this . . . with this case so many . . . they have made so many promises, they are proven in the end to be just what they are — hollow words that sound wonderful at election time but prove to be very empty, utterly devoid of any substance whatsoever.

I think it's only right that we continue to remind the Premier and the other members on that side of the House of the current Premier's words when he was leader of the opposition. From the *Star-Phoenix* on November 20, 1989, I quote:

Roy Romanow capped off the NDP annual convention pledging to eliminate poverty in his first term in office.

That was his promise, Mr. Speaker, that he would eliminate child poverty. But he did not. He was going to eliminate all poverty in Saskatchewan in his first term and that ended nearly two years ago. It was a big promise to make at the time, Mr. Speaker, and I guess it proved to be too big.

Just last year, the same Premier stated in this House:

It's a promise that has to be made and it's a promise that has to be kept. Whether it can be achieved and kept, I don't know.

What a strange statement to make, Mr. Speaker. According to his own words, the Premier got caught up in the branches while reaching for the stars. My question is: why would a Premier make such a promise when according to his own statements, he doesn't know whether he can keep it or not? Isn't that the very

essence of a promise, a commitment made to the voters to do what you say you're going to do?

There are no shades of grey when it comes to promises. You either do it or you don't do it. And the Premier fully admitted that he made this one without knowing whether he could keep the promise or not. It not only shows a lack of commitment to the people of this province, it also shows dishonesty regarding a very important issue.

While the government opposite chooses to play political ping-pong with children in poverty, the simple fact remains that they are still going to school cold and hungry.

I can already hear the members chirping about the federal government. Well somehow six other provinces have a better record than Saskatchewan when it comes to child poverty and the last time I checked they have the same federal government.

Mr. Speaker, children are in poverty because their parents are in poverty. On average during the 1996-97 fiscal year, there were 80,747 Saskatchewan people on social assistance. That means one in every twelve people in this province was on welfare. That's simply too many. The total Social Services budget has climbed from 390 million in 1991 to 511 million in the coming fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the reason why they had to climb is because there's more people on welfare. Mr. Speaker, let's look at the reasons behind a high welfare rate —simply put, it's the lack of opportunities in our province. People faced with unemployment quickly lose hope, Mr. Speaker. Those who don't leave Saskatchewan for opportunities in other provinces stay behind and they end up on welfare rolls. There is no greater killer of hope and drive than for able-bodied individuals who want to work not being able to find a job.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is not the only one that said . . . that stood in the House and made promises that he can't keep. The current Minister of Education is also pretty good at getting caught up in the branches.

I quote from the *Star-Phoenix* on October 3, 1991: "If elected, the New Democratic Party will work to get rid of food banks." So what happened? Six years later we now have more food banks in Saskatchewan than ever before. And that's because there's never been a greater need.

In 1997 there are 10 food banks operating in our province. They are located in Biggar, in Manor, in Melfort, in Melville, Moose Jaw, Outlook, Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, and Unity. It seems this is one of the few growth industries we have in the province.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm saddened by the increased need for food banks, I certainly congratulate those hard-working, community-orientated people who have been instrumental in stepping in and filling what they saw as a great need in their community. It becomes clear that with the coming of food banks in smaller centres in our province, the issue of poverty is not just an urban issue, and the government has got to remember that when it sets up the hot meals program.

The problem extends out to our smaller rural communities now and programs have got to be tailored to meet that need. Programs that are used in Regina and Saskatoon may not necessarily be right for our smaller towns, and I hope the government keeps this in mind.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about food banks we have to talk about those who are using them. Accordingly, the Regina and Saskatoon food banks in 1996, about half of all those coming for their basic necessities in terms of food were children. In 1996, Regina Food Bank saw over 43,000 children, three-quarters of which were under the age of 12 years old.

What kind of life can they be leading, Mr. Speaker? When one looks at these kind of statistics, we can quickly figure out at least one of the reasons that Saskatchewan leads the way when it comes to youth crime. When our children have no hope about their future, when they see no light at the end of the tunnel, it's all too often that they turn to a life of crime.

And as we've argued in this House on many occasions during session, once kids do turn to that life of crime this government disavows any responsibility for them. Simply because it is a provincial responsibility to set up effective and workable rehabilitation and punishment programs for young offenders, this government sees that as no reason to take away any responsibility. The Premier simply says that the legislature has simply too much on its plate to deal with an issue like this.

It doesn't matter that people are demanding something has to be done. It doesn't matter that people's property and their safety are threatened by the upswing in youth crime. It doesn't matter that a policeman was almost run down and a young offender was accidentally nearly shot in Saskatoon. All that matters to the members opposite is ensuring none of this is put on their shoulders, even though that's where a great deal of the responsibility should lie.

Mr. Speaker, child poverty is one of those issues where all political parties have got to work together in order to find solutions. It cannot be simply used as a political poker chip. We've got to do something for our youth because they are our future. And so far I haven't seen this government do anything concrete in this province when it comes to this problem.

So if you want me to give them a credit for a child poverty rate of 21.6 per cent, I will. If those members want credit for 81,000 people on welfare in Saskatchewan, they can take the credit. And if those members want the credit for 43,000 children visiting food banks last year, they can have credit for that as well. If that's the credit the members opposite want to take to the people of Saskatchewan as a sign of their accomplishments, they can be my guest.

Mr. Speaker, I've listened to the banter back and forth across the floor and really it does make me sad. I guess maybe politics is our job, something that we're expected to do. But when it comes to child poverty, it should be out of the bounds of politics.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — The children in poverty in our province do not gain from this controversy. What we need is not politics, we need action. We don't need paper or reports, we need action. We on this side of the House implore the government to use their majority, to use their mandate, and to use their money — our money — to make a difference in the lives of the children in this province.

Thank you.

Mr. Koenker: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I scarcely know where to begin, Mr. Speaker. As one of my colleagues says just a few minutes ago, the spectacle of what we have heard from the member from Humboldt and now the member from Kelvington-Wadena is almost such to immobilize a person. I say I am scandalized by this shameful and dishonest spectacle of rhetoric about child poverty in this Assembly, the deliberate twisting of the truth — intentionally twisting the truth and the facts of the matter — the sanctimony in which it's done, and the political grandstanding that accompanies it.

And the member from Humboldt can smile, but it's sickening to watch this spectacle today. And it's shameful. And I dare say if any of your constituents are watching on the televised *Hansard*, you are a discredit to this institution. I say that.

(1515)

The truth really hurts, the member from Humboldt says. It must hurt her painfully to deal with the truth, to perpetrate the kind of misinformation that she has this afternoon. The member from Kelvington-Wadena says we don't need politics, we need action. And then has the gall not to even mention the child action plan in her remarks — does not even deign to mention a doubling of funding for the child action plan in this budget.

And in fact the members opposite in this Assembly voted against the child action plan here in Saskatchewan. And then they have the gall to get up today and indulge in rhetoric, attacking the government for doing nothing. I say that actions speak a whole lot louder than words.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — And I say that the people of Saskatchewan only have to look to this budget, this most recent budget, to see actions and not words when it comes to child poverty.

I want to make the point that in this most recent budget, funding for the child action plan here in Saskatchewan has doubled from more than \$11 million last year to \$24.7 million this year. That is action — that is not rhetoric; that is fact — that is not fiction or fantasy.

A colleague says send them a copy of the child action plan for this next year. I say, it wouldn't do much good based on the spectacle of the performance we've just seen because they would ignore the facts of the plan.

I want to speak, Mr. Speaker, about the . . . another measure in this most recent budget, and that's the way in which this

provincial government here in Saskatchewan is going to invest \$6 million as a bridge to the child benefit plan.

Now people have to understand, first of all, the fact that it was the Government of Saskatchewan that has led the nation in the call for a child benefit plan for this country — a national plan. And it isn't just that the Government of Saskatchewan is calling or talking about the need for a national plan; the Government of Saskatchewan is putting that plan into action this next month.

The Government of Saskatchewan in fact is going it alone because the federal government is unprepared to move on a child action plan or a child benefit until 16 months, at the earliest, from now. This is really unbelievable, but not so unbelievable when you consider that there's a federal election in the air. And maybe that federal election might just have something to do with the evasion of reality from the members on the opposite side.

I have here an article from the February 20 *Vancouver Sun* written by columnist Barbara Yaffe. And I want to quote from this article rather extensively because it gives a perspective on the issue that isn't restricted simply to Saskatchewan but is . . . makes reference to the circumstances in another province, British Columbia, as well.

Ms. Yaffe begins her article by writing of the federal budget, and I quote:

Depending on your politics, this week's federal budget is a brilliant political document or a manipulative bit of sophistry.

And then she goes on to talk about the impression that the Chrétien Liberals have given that they remain the protectors of Canadians' social programs and guardians of the poor. And she writes, and I quote:

A program for low-income families with children. And expanded tax credits for post-secondary education (are included in this budget).

But closer scrutiny of the dollar side leaves a different impression of the Grits — a government determined to clean up Canada's finances even if social programs are sliced and diced.

And this is precisely what is happening. And Ms. Yaffe goes on to talk about the fact, and I quote again:

Since 1993 when the Chrétien government took office, it has drastically slashed funding to provinces for social programs — from \$30 billion a year in 1995-'96 to \$25 billion in 1997-'98. B.C.'s . . . (Minister of Finance) calculates the 10 provinces are down nearly \$9 billion to date and will have lost \$22.4 billion by (the year) 2000.

Now Ms. Yaffe goes on to talk about the flotilla, what she refers to as a flotilla of new initiatives on the social side from the federal government, and then comments that there is little cash, relatively speaking, involved in this flotilla of new initiatives. And she says, and I'll quote again:

New money is carefully targeted to select groups. It's to be spent, in some cases, over four years. And the sums for each program are small by government standards.

All the initiatives — for the four fiscal years, 1996-'97 through to '99-2000 — will cost 34 billion.

Meanwhile, spending cuts . . . for the coming fiscal year will total 4.4 billion.

This is really quite incredible that we can have members on the opposite side of the House speak to the issue of child poverty in this province, and admittedly it is a problem, but not speak to the facts of the matter in terms of the larger context as to why we have the scale or magnitude of the problem that we do here in Saskatchewan.

The member opposite, in her earlier remarks, would lead people to believe that it's because Saskatchewan hasn't dealt with unemployment, that that's the reason we have so many people on social welfare, and totally ignores the fact of federal offloading of status Indians onto the provincial welfare roles — not one mention of that fundamental problem.

Neither does the member opposite — either of the members that have spoken on this issue — mention Unemployment Insurance cuts and what effect that has had on the province. It's almost as if these problems have nothing to do with the reality of poverty in Saskatchewan. And that is what I find so reprehensible about the representations that have been made on the opposite side this afternoon. They have fundamentally failed to tell the truth. And I think that the opposition has a responsibility to tell the truth about poverty in this country and in this province, and give more than a one-sided, sanctimonious I might say, attack on the government.

This is not what the people of Saskatchewan want after all. I think that the people of Saskatchewan are really looking for their elected representatives to work together on the problems that affect the people of the province, and not to engage in political grandstanding and rhetoric and sanctimony. I think the people of Saskatchewan that I talk to are concerned about the issue of poverty in our province and are concerned to see that something gets done, and not that sanctimonious speeches are made.

I think that the people of Saskatchewan are looking for concrete, tangible, palpable help for children in poverty. And if that means an increase in family income plan benefits of \$3.3 million this year, so be it. It may not be enough. It may not be enough for the members of the opposition, it may not be enough for the members of the public, but something concrete and tangible and palpable is happening in this province in relation to poverty.

We have a long road to travel in this regard, but to get to our destination of eliminating poverty in our province isn't helped when members of the opposition ignore reality. We need to work together. I will acknowledge that there's poverty in this province. I will acknowledge that it's a problem in this province. But I will tell the truth about it as well, which you haven't done, Madam Member from Humboldt.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — I will acknowledge the fact that I personally have not done enough on the government's side to fight this problem and this evil. I'll acknowledge that. But I want to know what you're going to do in concrete terms, other than to get up and blather about the problem in rhetorical terms, especially when you don't tell the truth about it.

And now you can giggle about it, as if it is somehow funny. What a spectacle we see this afternoon. This is shameful. This isn't what the people of Saskatchewan expect from their elected representatives. They expect the truth.

I'm going to talk for awhile this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the Canadian council for social development.

An Hon. Member: — Now are they credible?

Mr. Koenker: — The member from Saskatoon Eastview asks if they're credible on the issue of poverty.

An Hon. Member: — Well I think so.

Mr. Koenker: — As the former minister of Social Services, he says he thinks they are credible on the issue of poverty. One would think that by virtue of the fact that he was a former minister of Social Services in this province, from the remarks we've heard this afternoon of the members of the opposition, his words can't be believed in any effect.

I urge the people who might be listening to either contact me at the Legislative Building or the government caucus office or to directly contact the Canadian Council on Social Development to secure some of their perspectives on poverty, because I find them to be some of the most unbiased, helpful perspectives on poverty that are available in our country today — extremely well researched, very thoughtful, task-oriented in terms of trying to deal with the issue of poverty and not score political points.

The Canadian Council on Social Development talks about some of the measures that need to be taken by all levels of government in this country to establish a national child benefit, to build a more coordinated approach to child poverty on the national and the provincial and the local level. And they make the point that there's an enormous amount of work that needs to be done. And I would agree.

There's an enormous amount of work that needs to be done here in Saskatchewan. And in that respect, the members opposite are right. I don't have any quarrel with that. Lord knows there's too much poverty in this province; there's too much poverty in this country. And we as elected members have a responsibility to do something about it. And here's what the Canadian Council on Social Development has to say by way of some positive, proactive suggestions toward establishing a national child benefit system.

(1530)

To start with, the Canadian Council on Social Development has called on governments to protect child benefits currently in place. There are some child benefits currently in place. They say these benefits need to be protected. For a moment let's forget about new benefits, let's just protect the benefits we have so there's no further erosion — no further erosion by virtue of the power of inflation. Protect the current child benefits that are in place in this country.

Each year total spending on the child tax benefit, they point out, nationally falls by 170 million because income thresholds and benefits levels are only partially indexed to inflation. Here's something positive we can do: to protect the child benefits currently in place.

The 1996 federal budget recognized the need to protect benefits for seniors against inflation. We haven't done that for children yet in this country. We need to do that. The Canadian Council on Social Development recommends that we need that same protection against inflation that's been afforded to seniors afforded to poor families with children. Here's a positive suggestion that I haven't heard from the members opposite. Here is a suggestion that needs action here in Saskatchewan and nation-wide, protecting current child benefits against any further erosion.

A second suggestion from the Canadian Council on Social Development, they call for more substantial, multi-year financial commitments to the development of a national child benefit system in our country. And we're making a start on that here in Saskatchewan this year with \$6 million in a transition bridging program, that we're going it alone, starting next month. A Saskatchewan child benefit plan that bridges the road to the national child benefit plan, still to come some 16 months hence.

The members opposite say we're doing nothing. This is something. This is something to address child poverty. A multi-year financial commitment, starting now in this most recent budget, to try to bring stability to poor families.

The Canadian Council on Social Development notes that the 600 million that was announced earlier this year in the federal budget, when distributed among poor families across Canada, makes an important but ultimately only a small drop in the child poverty statistics.

When people are living in poverty, any pittance you throw their way is important. But we need to do more than throw pittances. We need to start with positive programs, and as they say, making multi-year financial commitments to child poverty in our country.

In fact the Canadian Council on Social Development says that you really need an additional investment of \$2 billion in addition to the 600 million that has been announced by the federal government — we need a commitment of \$2 billion to reduce the number of children by 20 per cent. Even the 20 per cent reduction is going to cost us \$2 billion.

And I'll say parenthetically here, this is one of the reasons why we in Saskatchewan are working so hard to reduce our debt. So that we can redirect that money that is really being squandered

on interest payments, based on that mountain of debt, so that we can redirect that money to social programs and begin to make multi-year commitments to child benefit programs. We can't do it right now with \$14 billion worth of debt, paying \$17 million a day . . . a week — in interest payments.

Rome wasn't built in a day, but we're starting down the road on a multi-year financial commitment.

A third element to the Canadian Council on Social Development call for policy change, is to continue to press both federal and provincial and territorial governments to set realistic targets and timetables for reducing child poverty in our country. Just as we have done on all levels of government with reducing the deficit, we need to do that in terms of the human deficit as well — the deficit created by poverty.

And they note that in 1997, we're nowhere near meeting the lofty commitment made by parliamentarians in Ottawa to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. This is a resolution passed in the House of Commons by all parties a number of years ago — to reduce poverty in Canada by the . . . to eliminate, eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. We're nowhere near that.

Realistic targets need to be set, matched by substantial financial commitments, growing financial commitments over the next years to demonstrate that all levels of government are serious about dealing with the problem of child poverty. And again I say we have not done enough. I readily admit that. We need to do more. We have to do more. We will do more. And we're committing to that in this most recent budget issued last month, Mr. Speaker.

Finally the Canadian Council on Social Development has noted that in the past a single child benefit, even if it's a substantial one, will not in and of itself adequately deal with the problem of child poverty. A child benefit plan is not the be-all and the end-all in terms of poverty. This requires a much more comprehensive strategy, they point out — a job strategy, a training strategy, a redesign of the whole social services system. We've announced that a year ago, a redesign of the social service program.

Tomorrow in fact the Minister of Post-Secondary Education will announce a new training strategy aimed particularly at putting those in poverty, living in chronic dependency on welfare, back into the workforce. Because ultimately a job is one of the best guarantors against living in poverty. And that's one of the other measures we're going to be attempting to implement here in this province.

It won't happen overnight but we're making a start on it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Tomorrow we're taking some of the first steps down the new road to a new training strategy now that the federal government has eliminated manpower training from their vocabulary.

A more comprehensive strategy. Basically because children are poor because their parents are poor. Children don't earn incomes. Parents earn incomes. We need a more comprehensive strategy.

And finally I'd like to quote a paragraph from the Canadian Council on Social Development position paper of March, 1997, their response to the 1997 federal budget. And I'd like to read this into the record, and I quote:

The . . . (Canadian Council on Social Development) calls on both levels of government to demonstrate continued leadership and to make a commitment to an open policy development process, so that families, community groups and other interested parties can help shape the future (of) child benefit system in Canada. Furthermore, we are urging governments to design and implement changes in a way that improves incomes and services for both working and non-working poor families.

I think this is where the action is really at, Mr. Speaker: a realistic plan to deal with poverty on both levels of government, provincial and federal, urging cooperation and partnership in this endeavour; calling for a commitment for ongoing policy reform; calling for concrete, tangible action to deal with these problems; and a long-term plan calling for the protection of those benefits that are already in place before we expand benefits to new programs. This is realistic. This is the kind of approach that we're attempting to use here in Saskatchewan to deal with child poverty.

That's why I take great exception to the fact that the members opposite simply attack the government for its failure to eliminate child poverty, as the words of the amendment read, and they don't recognize the need for a common partnership and a common endeavour on behalf of Saskatchewan people to attack the problem of poverty and work together in eliminating it.

We're not going to eliminate poverty if we engage in rhetorical political wars with one another. We will eventually eliminate poverty, I'd like to believe someday, if, Madam Member, we can join hands and work together and deal with some of the real problems that Saskatchewan people have and not engage in flights of rhetoric simply to score political points.

So with those remarks I will certainly not be voting for the amendment and I certainly will support the amendment . . . the motion acknowledging the efforts that are being made here in Saskatchewan to eliminate child poverty.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very pleased also to stand in support of the motion. Mr. Speaker, as a parent, as a teacher, as an elected representative, I am proud of our Premier. I am proud of our government on putting our children first. Our children are a priority, not only in words but in action.

And to think that almost one Canadian child in five lives in poverty in one of the richest societies in world history is not acceptable. And our government has recognized this and we've made a commitment that we will improve on this. And we've taken it to the national agenda. It is a national disgrace that

there are Canadian children living in poverty.

We've taken two approaches to fighting child poverty. One is to take a lead in convincing the federal government to implement a national child benefit. Well the federal government now has agreed to this and this will be the first new national social program in 30 years, and that's good, and the provinces have agreed to this — but they are waiting, waiting, waiting until July of 1998 to begin. That's unconscionable; that's not acceptable. How do you ask hungry children, people living in poverty, to wait, wait another 18 months. We've got words in our budget, but we have no money in our budget.

I think we need to take a little bit of time to go back on some of the background. Saskatchewan has been working hard on a broad . . . on trying to put together a broadly based, income-tested children's benefit to replace social assistance for children and to support low income working families.

We worked with other provinces, we put a redesign in place, and when we do have this accepted right across Canada, as I said, the federal government says, well we like the idea but we're going to wait; we'll give it words but no money.

(1545)

The objectives of a national child benefit are to help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty. It's to promote independence by ensuring that families are better off working than on welfare, and to reduce overlap and duplication between federal and provincial benefit programs.

Now when the federal government put the words in their budget but didn't put the money in their budget, did our provincial government say, well we'll wait then too till July of 1998? No. No. We said no, we can work on this, we will adjust on this, and we will put funding in place now in this year's budget.

So we redefined our programs. We redefined the programs because we weren't going to wait. Child poverty is a priority, should be a priority of not only New Democrats but also should be a priority of Liberals and even Tories.

So we redefined it and we worked on it and we put in transition funding. We will have now a Saskatchewan child benefit which will provide enhanced benefits to low income families on a monthly per-child basis, and a Saskatchewan employment supplement which will provide benefits to low income families receiving employment or child maintenance support income.

We are putting the money where the words are. We won't wait.

This new funding includes, in our budget, \$3.8 million to enhance the Family Income Plan. What's in the federal government's budget? What do the feds have? They have a promise, and they have cuts to all the health care, social programs, and education programs right across this country.

You know, and then we have money for the child care centre capital grants. Because it's important for people to have child care spaces for their children. We put a million dollars in our budget — a million dollars. But what's in the federal Liberal

budget? Promises and cuts.

We have one-time child nutrition and development projects, a half a million dollars in our provincial budget. What does the federal Liberals have? Zero. They have promises and cuts to programs.

We have money in our budget for school supplies for social assistance families, a half a million dollars — action for children in poverty. What do we have in the federal budget? Promises. Cuts. Words, but no money.

We have \$200,000 for northern community development in our budget. Real money, new money — this is all new funding — to address child and family poverty. What does the federal Liberals have? They have zero again. They have promises — wait till 1998. No new money, no action.

We have a commitment of a total of \$6 million of new money, new transitional funding, in our budget. We have action. We also have new funding for northern housing initiatives of \$3 million. We have new money for national child support guidelines, \$1.1 million. There's new funding to support youth at risk, street youth, youth prostitution, to develop community-based outreach projects as a measure of helping children get off the street safely — \$250,000 — a quarter of a million dollars. What's in the federal budget? Nothing. Words, promises; no money — there's cuts.

We have a half a million dollars for restorative youth justice strategy — a half a million dollars for that — for the development of alternative measures for youth in conflict with the law. We have a half a million dollars for coordinated behaviour management initiatives to help services for youth with challenging behaviours. We have put money into our budget for action to help children at risk.

We also have in our budget new funding for supporting vulnerable children. Proper nutrition, good health, are critical factors in childhood development. We have additional money of \$.6 million for nutritional programs, new hepatitis A immunization program, and enhanced public education. This is all new money for children in poverty and to help address family poverty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also know the very, very importance of early intervention. We are strengthening, putting more money into, early childhood development. There's an additional \$1.3 million being put in for children and families through early childhood development initiatives — real, new money; \$150,000 for early skills development program — help for young children, ages three to five years, with aggressive or antisocial behaviour.

We're putting \$170,000 in for a successful mother support program; \$120,000 of new funding for a fetal alcohol syndrome strategy; \$60,000 for an early childhood intervention program; \$160,000 for teen and young parent program; \$150,000 for teen infant centres; and half a million dollars for support for child care workers, enhancement of their wages of a very valuable service for the people of Saskatchewan, for the children of Saskatchewan.

This is new money. What has the federal Liberals done? What does their budget say? What did they say? They said some promises, and they had cuts.

When we want to deal with child poverty, what I have gone over right now is a specific strategy right on child poverty and to help those families at risk. But we also have a larger strategy, because we all know — we all know that investing in children is investing in people, and our budget and our Speech from the Throne in this session has made a commitment to the people of Saskatchewan as one of our top priorities is jobs. And the jobs, and good jobs for our people of Saskatchewan, will help the children and the families of this province.

Now again if we look at our priorities and what we've done in this province and we compare it to what the Liberals say and what the Liberals do — well what they don't do — I think . . . it's just I'm very proud of the government. What we offer is hope, we offer vision, and we offer action — action, real action. Jobs is a priority. And of course we would like to have a lower unemployment rate, but we do have the lowest unemployment rate right now right across Canada. What do we see at the federal level? A high unemployment rate, and their budget is still cutting jobs.

We have a balanced budget and we're paying down the debt because we don't want to mortgage the future of our children in this province any longer. Because that's what happened when the Tories were in power, and that's the Liberal policies that we now see at the federal level. They're mortgaging the future of our children in this country. They not only are still running deficits, the Liberal government financially, they are deficit of ideas.

Our federal leader, who was here just recently in Saskatchewan, put forward a platform of hope, optimism, and future for the families of this country. The Liberals are now scrambling around in back rooms trying to figure out their platform yet. That kind of tells me this is a government that lacks ideas, lacks hope, lacks vision for the country.

Our debt is reducing; the federal Liberal debt is increasing.

Taxes. Taxes. In our provincial budget, we've been able to reduce taxes from 9 per cent to 7 per cent. But not only that, we have a narrower scope of taxation than any other province right across this country. And we also have acknowledged our children in our taxation. We don't put taxes on children's clothing. We don't have taxes on home heating. We don't have taxes on books, prescription medicine.

Now what does the federal government say and what is the federal government and Liberals doing across this country? They're expanding the tax base. Tax more, take more money from individual families so there's less money for children — but more money for business, but less money for the families across this country. Expand the taxation base. That really helps to attack child poverty.

Now also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's interesting, another little piece of legislation that the federal Liberals are looking at —

good Liberal policy — some tax credits for people that really need to have some tax exemption. This is if you donate your money to American charities. Very interesting concept. Or to support American education programs, universities. Then you can use it as a write-off, so you don't have to pay tax here.

Now that's a good idea, to give a tax break for our Canadian taxpayers to put their money in American institutions and support American charities. That sounds like a good, good plan to help attack child poverty in this country.

There's been social programs, health . . . social programs, health, and education are a priority. And we have said that in our budget. That's investing in children. Health, education, and social programs — all priorities for the young people of our province.

What do we see in the federal Liberal policy? And actually our provincial Liberals too, they're always supporting this. So cuts, \$7 billion worth of cuts right across this country. Now this last budget they put a few million dollars back in, after they've cut billions of dollars.

An Hon. Member: — Must be an election coming.

Ms. Bradley: — Yes. And not only that, I mean we've had to back-fill every one of those dollars in this province, and we're proud we have. And we've put additional money in because we believe in the strength of social programs, health, and education for our families and for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Another piece of legislation that I know Liberals like to support which is a drain — and all of this ties in with poverty because if these are your priorities then you don't have priorities for social programs. You don't have priorities for children at risk — the drug patent piece of legislation. That's a really helpful way for us to spend our health care dollars; so that the drug companies can have unbelievable profits, and that we cannot then provide and not have enough money for the kind of health care services that should be right across this country. Trying to again rip apart . . . to have a two-tiered health system in this country. Try to destroy the idea of a national drug plan, which they say they support, but is it in their budget? Is it in their legislation? No, it's not.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of these parts are part of the picture of a government . . . of Liberal governments not, not caring about children and poverty — not setting it as a priority.

I even want to look at transportation issues — and this might seem a little odd in this kind of a debate, but it's not. Because the impact of the transportation, or the lack of a transportation policy across this country, affects our communities, especially in rural Saskatchewan. It affects us — \$380 million, Crow rate, gone. Abandon the railways, and it has such an impact. It has an impact on every community and on our farmers.

(1600)

Who do they care about? Who does this Liberal government

care about? They care about the railroads — deregulate, oh yes, they can get a bigger increase. Oh, when they can't get the grain to port, who should pay? The farmers. The families of Saskatchewan should pay; not the railroads, oh no, no.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have put a child benefit plan together now, a child action plan now, and of course the Liberals have said wait till 1998. We have put together an agenda that's bringing us into the 21st century by investing in people but investing in children. And it is one of our priorities — of our very top priorities.

And all of the factors around it of a good, balanced government that knows how to balance a budget; knows how to reduce our debt; knows how to invest the money in the priorities of the people and the families of this province. That's how you attack child poverty. You don't just have words; you take action. And you make sure that you're a good government, and that a government that's not mortgaging the future of our country, our families, and our children.

We need a government that offers hope and optimism. And I believe in the motion that we've put forward here, is part of that hope and optimism for this province, for the children of Saskatchewan. We have to continue to work on poverty in all aspects of our governing. That is so very, very important. We all must pull together.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bradley: — Mr. Speaker, I know that we will be able to do this by working together with the communities across this province because in Saskatchewan we know how to work with cooperation, with compassion; we believe in working together.

Many, many problems we still have to solve and work on, but we will work with the people of Saskatchewan. We have an action plan that we're taking on now, and we must continue to pursue that so that one day, one day that we can say that we have solved this problem. And we will continue to work on that. And I support — support the motion. I do not support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Deputy Speaker, I'm pleased to enter this debate, although I am saddened to say that I was offended last week when in this House, the Deputy Premier demeaned himself and his position by accusing my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Humboldt, of playing petty politics on the issue of child poverty and only being concerned with child poverty when an election was looming.

Mr. Speaker, may I say that if there is any single member of this House who has shown a continuing commitment to youth issues, it is surely the member for Humboldt. If there is any member of this House who can say that her commitment to children is not something she simply drags out on a quadrennial basis for election time, it is surely my colleague from Humboldt.

As for the provincial government, may I say in the words of a

book which I believe the hon. member for Sutherland has some acquaintance with, "By your works shall ye know them." And I respectfully submit that those words condemn our provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, we have been told so many times in this session that Saskatchewan leads the way. Saskatchewan is the general in the army in the fight against child poverty.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that is the case then I would assume that our record on child poverty and youth issues would be considerably better than other besotted provinces who don't have the same enlightened government that we are blessed with. I would assume if that was the case, that our child poverty statistics would be so much better than the national average. I would assume, I would assume, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan's child poverty rate would be far lower than those provinces that do not have an NDP government. Then and only then could we claim to be a beacon, a beacon, Mr. Speaker, for which other more backward provinces are striving to catch up.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as I look over the statistics, I have to say that's not, unfortunately, the story that the facts paint. Instead of us being in the vanguard, instead of us being the general leading the way in the fight against child poverty, what the statistics say is that we are camp followers, straggling somewhere in the rear.

Mr. Speaker, we see on child poverty, the nation's second highest level. We see considerably more child poverty in this province than in any other western province. Our level of tooth decay — the highest in western Canada among our children ever since the government cancelled the dental program.

What is the commitment here, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well, we have been challenged all through this session by a government that wants to use this forum to fight the federal election, and we are told that we should be in there fighting the federal election in this Assembly. And then we're even accused of maybe being ashamed of our federal counterparts if we don't turn this into a federal election campaign on a daily basis.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not a question of pride or shame. It is our view, it is our view that the people of Canada and the people of Saskatchewan will soon have the opportunity to make a judgement on who will be the best government for this nation. And I believe that the voters of Saskatchewan and Canada are quite capable of making that judgement without us trying to interfere. I think we can go about our work, I think we can go about our work in this Assembly of working for the betterment of this province and its people. And the citizens will make their judgement, ultimately.

Do they think that Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin and Ralph Goodale are better people to entrust with their affairs? Or do they think, no, we should shove them aside; that what we really need to clean up all the problems is we need Alexa McDonough and we need John Solomon, we need Svend Robinson and we need Chris Axworthy to run this nation. They will do a better job than Prime Minister Chrétien and Paul Martin and Ralph Goodale.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — I have enough confidence in my fellow citizens to think that they will be able to make a right judgement on these matters. And I think that I and my colleagues can go about doing our job for which we were elected, serving the people of Saskatchewan, without trying to turn this Assembly into a soap box to run a federal election campaign.

And I believe too that we are saying that we are a beacon that other Canadians should follow. It just could be that other Canadians will look at the Saskatchewan statistic and ask themselves, hmm, is that really where we want to be; do we really want to run ahead to try and catch up to Saskatchewan so fast that we end up being at the back of the pack where they are?

Well my friends, well my friends, my friends opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are fond of saying, well what are your plans? You know, you've pointed out how Saskatchewan is bringing up the rear in their fight against child poverty, that the beacon is way back there. You know we've got a government here that's trying to find the future by looking in the rear-view mirror.

Okay, so what's our plan? Well okay. My colleague, my esteemed colleague, the member for Humboldt, has come out with a plan to end the blight of child prostitution. We know that the worst form of prostitution, the most destructive form of prostitution is the street prostitution problem. We know that street prostitution so oftentimes involves girls and boys of extremely young age.

Now my colleague has suggested and brought forward a Bill to try and address that problem. We're still waiting for some word from the government as to whether or not they will accept that Bill.

Now again, I say I'm not here as an apologist for Ottawa; I might say I'm also not here as an apologist for Alberta. But that reactionary right-wing government in Alberta, that backward reactionary government, they have taken these steps on child prostitution, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now why can't our government, why can't our government do the same? They're saying they're so much more progressive than the Alberta government, Well how is it that the Alberta government has moved on the issue of child prostitution and they have not?

Well what are some other suggestions? Well again I have the honour to sit behind my colleague from Kelvington. And my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena has brought forward a Bill in this House to address the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome.

Now I heard . . . I heard, yes I heard the hon. member from Weyburn-Big Muddy say that they were going to put money into the fetal alcohol syndrome problem. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the suggestion of the member from Kelvington-Wadena made far more sense, and I'll tell you why. The sad thing about fetal alcohol syndrome is there is no treatment, there is no cure, there is no counselling. Once it has happened, it has happened. The only way, the only way . . . tragically and unfortunately the only way to deal with the issue

of fetal alcohol syndrome is to stop it at source. And my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena recognized that.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, fetal alcohol syndrome or course occurs during gestation, during pregnancy, and from what we know in fact in the early stages of pregnancy. Consequently spending money on children born with fetal alcohol syndrome unfortunately will not, will not reverse the damage done. The only way, the only way you can address it is to try and catch it before it happens through education of expectant mothers. There is no other way.

So here are two suggestions. They maybe won't turn the province upside down, but here are two suggestions, practical suggestions, suggestions that won't cost fortunes but concrete, practical suggestions to try and deal with these pressing social problems — one on child prostitution, one on fetal alcohol syndrome.

My friends opposite say, well what are the Liberals saying? Well this is what we're saying. Why is it so difficult — why is it so difficult for them not to simply accept the intelligence of these practical Liberal proposals and put them into effect?

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . well we're coming up with a few million, we're coming up with a few million for child poverty; isn't that wonderful. The VLTs (video lottery terminal) took in 100 million last year.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the reactionary, backward province of Alberta, since the introduction of VLTs, they have had two studies to ascertain what are the social impacts of the VLTs and who's putting the money in them.

We don't know that about Saskatchewan. The reason we don't know is because we haven't done any studies. Now the reactionary Government of Alberta has had two studies. Our progressive government refuses to even look at where the VLT money is coming from.

(1615)

Is it possible that it is coming out of welfare cheques? Is it possible it is coming out of food budgets from poor families? Is it possible that it is in part responsible for child hunger in this province?

I see them shaking their heads. Well then why don't you do a study to find out? But you refuse to. Ralph Klein will do that study to find out where this money is coming from; you won't. Do you prefer fact finding tours of Amsterdam to find out the effects of these policies?

So now we have got to, we have got to do some studies on this, as I say. Alberta's done two of them, Alberta's done two of them. Why can't we do a study on this to find out what the effects of the VLTs on poor families has been in this province?

I would also like to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in our attempts to help, we must always be cognizant of the necessity to try and empower and try and uplift as opposed to enforcing dependency.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the case of feeding programs, we agree here that it is terribly important, it's terribly important that young children not be left hungry because of the shortcomings or perceived shortcomings of their parents. We understand that we cannot expect youngsters to be able to properly learn in school on hungry stomachs.

But as we introduce feeding programs we must do so in such a way so as not to undermine the fundamental parental responsibility to feed their children. Our responsibility, our responsibility as government, is to aid parents to feed their children. And to the extent that we send out the message that it will now become a governmental responsibility to feed children or a school responsibility to feed children rather than a parental responsibility, we are not helping the problem, we are making it worse.

Now how do we have feeding programs that empower parents? How do we have feeding programs that will empower parents? I believe that we can assist without undermining, we can assist without reinforcing dependency. But I submit that in all of our efforts we must keep in mind always that we are not here to reinforce dependency . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Now members opposite say, what is your program, what are your proposals?

I've given two proposals of my colleagues. Well I'd be happy if the government would say that they will accept the hon. member's Bill on fetal alcohol syndrome and I'm sure that we could come up with it immediately. Unfortunately, you know, she found last time it was a waste of time because the government just wasn't prepared to listen to any of her practical, concrete suggestions.

Now what about, what about the federal government? Well we've seen the child support guidelines that have been introduced which are to put in some consistency and standardization in child maintenance and payment by non-custodial spouses. I'm pleased to see that our Minister of Justice is adopting this federal initiative. That's a step forward. That's a reform. And I think that any time that our Saskatchewan officials pay attention to some of the progressive initiatives of Ottawa, they certainly are to be congratulated, and I do so.

Now we have the child action plan — members opposite pointed out the first major, the first major social initiative in this nation in a generation. Now of course, of course friends opposite will tell me that actually Ottawa was definitely opposed to this, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Ottawa didn't want to do anything for hungry children. They were dragged. They were dragged kicking and screaming into this initiative by the most progressive province on child issues. And that most progressive province was guess where in the pack? Was it number one out of ten on child issues, or was it number two out of ten, or three? Well, Mr. Speaker, this progressive Saskatchewan of ours was number nine out of ten. But notwithstanding the fact that we're well back in the rear, it was Saskatchewan, friends opposite will tell me, that forced Ottawa to come up with the child action plan.

And the hon. member opposite, that's incredible, it's nonsense to claim that Ottawa came up with the child action plan because of agitation from Saskatchewan. I agree with him, what an incredible, what a bizarre statement to make. And I think that the people of Canada say when they make their judgement in the federal campaign, they will be able to make their own judgement on that; they don't need my say so on that.

Well members opposite have also pointed out that the full effects of the child action plan won't be felt until next year, when nearly a billion dollars will be spent by our federal government for poor children. However this year, this year fortunately, contrary to what some members opposite have led us to think, this year \$195 million to enrich the child supplement for working income families . . . for low income families. So as of July . . . so Canada Day 1997 . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. Members of course have an opportunity to engage in this debate. A number of members of the legislature have already, a number have not, and I know that are anxious to participate. I know those members are anxious to participate in this debate, and I can assure you that you will be given an opportunity. In the meantime let us do the courtesy to the member from North Battleford of listening to his remarks. Order.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank the Deputy Speaker for your intervention, but I accept when you tell the pure, unvarnished truth, you are bound to hit some sensitive nerves somewhere, so, you know, I accept that. And obviously that's the case here, because when I talk about the child benefit plan, \$195 million from Ottawa this year; 850 million next year.

Mr. Speaker, Canada Day — Canada Day, 1997, I predict, will be a day of celebration throughout our country for many reasons. This Canada Day will dawn bright and warm and sunny. It will have the child benefit plan in place — the first social program in this nation in a generation. It will see the government of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin and Ralph Goodale safely re-elected so we know we have another four years of good government ahead of us, and we will indeed have cause to celebrate.

So the interim plan, yes, is only going to be 195 million. But that's only a down payment on what the federal government is giving. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, though of course, as my colleague from Humboldt has pointed out, the federal government will be paying for all poor children, all poor families. And in the case of the working poor, they will actually get that money. In the case of the poor who are on social assistance, that will be clawed back by the provincial government. That's how they're showing their commitment to poor families.

So they're showing their commitment to families on welfare by saying they'll just claw back that money from Ottawa, which means that our welfare costs in Saskatchewan will fall because the welfare that doesn't go into the VLT machines will go into Regina's pocket because they will drop the welfare payments to poor families.

So this will be good news for the provincial treasury. How much of that money will get back into youth and child programs is something that we will be watching. Certainly I know my colleague from Humboldt will be watching very carefully and closely to see that some of this money makes its way back into services for our young people.

I said it a few minutes ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when we attempt to help the least privileged in society, we must ensure that our help empowers them and does not reinforce dependency. In that regard we have to always keep in mind that the best strategy is a good job for mom and dad. The best way to feed a hungry child is to provide for the parents.

I was once at a Save the Children banquet where the president of Canada Save the Children made the comment that we do not consider it as our job to feed children. It is the parents' job. It is our job to provide parents with the tools whereby they can feed their own children.

Now he was saying that from the perspective of a volunteer agency, but surely it is equally true of government.

Now I would say that as well as it being our role as government to see that parents have the jobs and the income and the stability to provide for their children, it is also our job in government to bequeath a debt-free Canada to them.

Now friends opposite tell us that the federal government is sinister and evil and perverted because they have tried to bring down the deficit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — The fact that our present federal government came in with a \$42 billion a year deficit and of course a debt of half a trillion dollars — now I believe 600 billion — and if we are looking at the youth of Canada and the youth of Saskatchewan, I would submit that one of the best and the most important things we can do for them is to make sure that when this is their country, when we have passed from the scene, that they do not inherit a crushing debt load.

And so to suggest, as Alexa McDonough suggests, that we can balloon the national debt in order to help children is perverted logic. How do you help children by guaranteeing an indebted future for them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that just simply doesn't work. You help children by ensuring that when they enter the workforce, they get this country debt-free. And that is what our government is trying to do. And Alexa McDonough's recipe for bequeathing our children a country a trillion dollars in debt is no help at all.

Now I've told you some of the initiatives of Liberal members of the legislature, some of the initiatives of the federal government, and we know that there's the issue of the curfew too that is coming about in many Saskatchewan municipalities.

Many Saskatchewan municipalities are concerned about curfews, which again points up the problem of young children who don't seem to be getting the guidance and the home

stability that they need.

Now in the United States where curfews have been brought in, they have required safe houses. And I know this is something again that my colleague from Humboldt has spoken of. One of the problems we have is that when young tykes are picked up off the street at 2 in the morning, where do you take them? And we tragically know that when young tykes are on the street at all hours of the night, there may or may not be a family at home in a proper state to receive them. That's why they're on the street in the first place of course.

(1630)

So simply picking up these children and taking them home unfortunately is not an option. I would hope that all members of the House would agree that taking them down to the cells of the police detachment is not an option for any of us. And so we have to look at the issue of safe houses. And again it is the member for Humboldt who has mentioned these issues. And contrary to what the Deputy Premier has suggested, she has been concerned about these issues and has raised these issues whether or not we're in the middle of an election campaign.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on about some of the issues of child poverty in this province but I do have some sympathy for my friends opposite. But I do think though that there are special issues in regards to child poverty as it relates to the North. And I think my friend and colleague from Athabasca is in a better position than I am to address the House on those issues.

The one thing I will say, we know in the North that we have by far the highest provincial birth rate, is in northern Saskatchewan, and so the issues are even more crucial there. The poverty rates are higher, the birth rate is higher, and so whatever social problems we see in the South in our cities are that much amplified when we go to northern Saskatchewan.

But as I say, I think that my friend and colleague from Athabasca is in a better position to describe these difficulties to us than I am, and I will now be seated and defer to him. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know I, like other members on this side of the House, have listened to the opposition members speaking and especially to the member from Kelvington-Wadena and from Humboldt who have referred to days past when our Premier talked about eliminating child poverty here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I find that an absolutely incredulous statement. Had the federal Liberals not cut hundreds of millions of dollars in transfer payments, our government would surely have been much better positioned to eliminate child poverty.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — When our Premier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, made the commitment to eliminate child poverty, I believe that

he surely also believed that the federal Liberal government would honour their financial commitment.

I listened also to the member from Battleford who said that . . . referred to the money from Ottawa, the 680 million that was going to be in place by this July 1 — July 1, 1997. Now I don't know how much influence that member has on the federal Liberals — I wish that he would exert that in other areas as well — but it's my understanding when I listened to the federal budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that money wasn't coming until July 1, 1998. And I think that is what the problem has been.

This 680 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is as well — and I point out to listeners — is not solely for the province of Saskatchewan. This is for the entire country, all of Canada, and I think it is woefully inadequate.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the member from Battleford also alluded to the fact that the Saskatchewan child benefit proposal was not . . . that is being purported now by the federal Liberals was not an idea of Saskatchewan's. Well I don't know how long he's . . . I know he hasn't been involved in politics very long, but had he been around in 1994 and 1995, his federal colleague, the federal Liberal minister, Minister Axworthy, at that time when he was minister responsible, went around the country talking about Saskatchewan's child benefit proposal and how wonderful it was. So I would think it logical that they have developed the policy that they now have from the Saskatchewan benefit.

So, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to support the motion made by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley:

That this Assembly applaud the government's commitment to reducing child poverty, including the national leadership shown by our Premier on the development of a national child benefit, and the recent doubling of funding for Saskatchewan's award-winning action plan for children.

And I'll surely be voting against the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, child and family poverty is one of the greatest social challenges facing Canadians today. The way in which we address this issue will test our commitment to the economic and social future of this country.

Judith Maxwell has observed that the economic and the social are interdependent. Social capital is the foundation of economic success, but today fewer and fewer dollars that we spend as a nation go towards social programs. In fact the social safety net which once defined us as Canadians has now been virtually totally eroded.

The Liberal government in Ottawa has allowed social programing to slip to the bottom of their priority scale. Its cuts to these programs have had a serious impact on the services all across the country. It's a damning indictment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of our nation, that we live in one of the wealthiest

countries in the world and yet we allow so many to go hungry and without.

Mr. Speaker, I've had family members that have spent years of working in underdeveloped countries in South Africa and the most difficulty they've had in coming back to Canada was the transition back into this country. When they came back to Canada my sister told me often that the difficulty she had was seeing around her a country that was so wealthy and yet seeing so many families and so many children that were living in poverty. And it was something that she and her husband at that time just couldn't adjust to. And in fact they even went through a fair bit of counselling to adapt back to this way of life again.

And so, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that we all need to be concerned about because it has implications for all aspects of society and for future generations.

Studies show that poverty contributes to numerous lifelong disadvantages such as poor education and life skills, poor health, poor employment prospects, and family problems. This can have a significant financial impact on society as a whole. Poor health and education and a disconnection from society can result in dependence on health and social programs and involvement with the justice system. Each one of us will be able to attest to evidence of that within our own communities. And this dependence can become generational.

Poverty is a complex issue and an issue that many governments and provinces are afraid to tackle. But I am pleased to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Saskatchewan is not one of those provinces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan has taken a leadership stand on the issue of child and family poverty. Three years ago, in partnership with communities across this province, we developed Saskatchewan's action plan for children. The action plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an innovative concept. It not only partners community groups, agencies, individuals and governments, it also links activities and initiatives between Saskatchewan's human services departments.

In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ministers responsible for the Department of Social Services, Education, Health, Justice, Municipal Government, and the Women's and Metis Affairs secretariats oversee the action plan.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the action plan, we have seen developments such as the children's council made up of volunteer representative agencies and individuals; the Children's Advocate; a community schools program; a community-based youth justice initiative; an integrated school link services strategy; a recreation strategy for youth at risk; housing initiatives; and much more.

The action plan has been recognized nationally for the work it is doing for children. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, its most important recognition will come when these children and youth are our community leaders.

Funding for the action plan has increased each year over the last three years. Today nearly 25 million has been targeted to

programs and services for children under the plan.

However, Mr. Speaker, this isn't all we're doing to address poverty in Saskatchewan and across Canada. Our Premier has taken a leadership role in raising the issue of family and child poverty to the national stage and has been instrumental in the development of the national child benefit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — While the federal government has said that the national child benefit will come into effect in July of 1998, we're not waiting. We're going to take immediate action, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Sonntag: — In the recent provincial government . . . in the recent provincial budget, I should say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we announced \$6 million to assist families to support children and to help communities develop programs and services which enable their citizens to remain independent. These initiatives will build on the programs and services we have and ensure a smooth transition into the national child benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you how pleased I am that Saskatchewan has taken such an important and strong stand on this issue. What we are doing in partnership with the people of this province is already having a significant impact on numerous individuals and communities. And this impact will increase over time.

But we can't be satisfied with this alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is still so much that we must do to adequately address this issue if Canada as we know it is to exist in the next generation. In many ways, the nation's children are the heart; they are the conscience; they are the future of Canada. It is because of them that we cannot let ourselves be lulled into apathy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask my Liberal colleagues across the floor to work with us on this very important initiative. And I urge them to call on their federal cousins to stop the continued erosion of Canada's social safety net. No Canadian can be proud of the rate at which children are now growing up in poverty.

Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former prime minister of Norway, said, "Poverty is still the gravest insult to human dignity. Poverty is the scar on humanity's face."

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I will wholeheartedly support the motion made by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley and I'll be voting against the amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. First of all, I am pleased to enter into this debate and second the amendment by the . . . to the motion put forward by the member from Humboldt.

And I just want to point out, Mr. Deputy Chairman, that the fact that the member from Humboldt, throughout my involvement with her and my experience with her in this Assembly and in other lives, has shown to me to be a very compassionate and kind and caring individual.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — There are many days, many, many days in which we sit and ponder the merits of living in Saskatchewan. And there're many, many other days when we believe that we've begun to have a breakthrough. She comes along and she explains to us what exactly a breakthrough is when we have a number of other serious problems and other serious social injustices happening in Saskatchewan every day of the week and every day of the year.

So, Mr. Deputy Chairman, I think it's very important that we understand that the member from Humboldt, his intentions are pure . . . her intentions are great, and certainly her commitment to social justice in Saskatchewan cannot be matched by anybody in this province.

So continuing on with some of the comments that I have. I think it's very, very important that we as legislators in this Assembly rise above the banter when we talk about social programs, we talk about poverty, and we talk about all the problems of Saskatchewan. We must rise above the silliness of some of these political games and the politics associated with this issue.

My Lord, Mr. Speaker, there are problems now. This is not a political debate — this is really about life. And throughout time, as we speak about some of the issues, we're not here to debate whether the provincial government match the federal government or whether our federal cousins are indeed poor managers of our economy. We are now debating the fact, where are we going to go from here as a province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1645)

Mr. Belanger: — We are not federal Liberal representatives across the floor. They shouldn't be federal New Democrats across the floor. This is the province of Saskatchewan — this is the province of Saskatchewan. These problems are ours, these problems deserve our attention, and these problems do not deserve banter, silliness, and silly politics. There's no way that we should ever, ever get to this level of discussion and this level of exchange.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no time in dealing with this problem. Political life is short — it is really short. And in general, life is too short to politicize the whole process of dealing with poverty rates.

As Liberals, we extended a hand across the floor to the New Democrats. We've given them ideas. And yet again the problems come across saying, well hold it here — this problem here with poverty and with children, well that's your federal Liberal cousins. What's the point? What's the point here?

What's the whole point here? The whole point is, while . . . because we're not doing anything about it, we'll blame somebody else. Is that the point? Well there is no point in that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a great problem in northern Saskatchewan. When I travel in northern Saskatchewan communities, as many members from across the floor may travel in inner-city communities or may travel in rural Saskatchewan, you can see firsthand, especially in northern Saskatchewan, some of the devastation that's happening when we refuse to depoliticize the process of social justice. That is the problem.

We're not here about power and control. We're not here to debate whether it's a federal or provincial responsibility. We're here today to make a difference to the many people in Saskatchewan. Not in Ottawa, but in Saskatchewan. This is where we govern, this is where we live, and this is where we must drive that change — that change for the benefit of Saskatchewan residents. And many, many of those Saskatchewan residents include families and include children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about a lot of ideas here. A lot of ideas. And constantly we always try and strive, how can we best deliver these ideas? And I can say with a lot of pride, from some of the families and some of the people I've seen in northern Saskatchewan, that there is a lot of effort being made by people in my communities to become better parents. There are many of them that are trying to build a better life for their own children.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll talk about a lesson that I've learned from my own father, who's raised a great number of kids, some of them successful, some of them not. But all through his life he's always told us as we go along: I'm working for you and when you get to be my age you must work for your children. And a lot of us didn't understand what he meant by that, but to this day we begin to understand. And as a legislator, I urge members from all parties — the Tories, Independent, the Liberals, and the NDP — that we must work together for the children. We have no choice. Whether we're right or wrong or whether we make a good speech or a better point than one another, that's not the point here. The point is not well taken by the people living in poverty. They say, here we have politicians once again playing a game. Here we have a debate of who's worse for the people that are living in poverty.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're the problem, we're at fault here, because we refuse to rise above the silliness; we refuse to rise above the politics. We have to begin to understand that poverty is not a political issue. Poverty is about life, and that's the important thing.

Mr. Speaker, I talk about the whole idea of speaking of poverty. And many people in this room sometimes romance the notion that we understand poverty — we don't and we shouldn't pretend to be. We shouldn't pretend to understand poverty, because many people in this room don't understand poverty. We see it, we see it in the little kids running around in the cities, we see it in our backyards some days, we see it in the crime that's happening throughout the province of Saskatchewan, and yet as long as it's out of sight in this

building it should be out of mind.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no way that it's out of my mind, and I know it's not out of Arlene . . . the member from Humboldt's mind and certainly the member from Kelvington-Wadena. We deal with this stuff almost every day, and we deal with problems with Social Services and problems with housing and problems with social injustice in general.

I guess one of the things you want to speak about today and certainly I want to talk about it, is in essence of what we feel is important to Saskatchewan. And I am reading from an article in the *Star-Phoenix* dated today where we talk about . . . it says, "Crown corporations post record operating profits." — record operating profits. And we have SaskPower, 139.2 million; SaskTel, 84 million; SaskEnergy, 73.3 million; Saferco, 31.2 million; SGI CANADA, 21.6 million; and the list goes on and on.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, isn't the point of owning Crown corporations designed so we're able to provide benefits to Saskatchewan people? Would not a truly socialist government take the profit to some of these organizations that they own to develop a really solid community development model in which we can begin to address economic and social injustices happening to any community, no matter how small, how large, how prosperous, or how poor. We should be one for all and all for one. But, Mr. Speaker, I don't see evidence of that.

Instead, we get up and we stand here and we talk about, well who's worse — your federal cousins. But we have not once mentioned their federal cousins, because this is not a federal/provincial issue. This is a provincial issue which we make responsibilities and the federal government does their contributions. The decisions that we make here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are provincial decisions, and it's time we started owning up to that responsibility. The Saskatchewan government will do their work when it comes to revamping and supporting our policies in reference to the poverty and the problem we have with many families in Saskatchewan.

Now when you walk throughout your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or any of the MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) walk through their constituency, when you walk to a young child that's in trouble with the law or a young child that may be out playing all day with nothing, no food in their stomach, what do you think? What do you think?

Do you think that this child's going to grow up to be a successful person? Do you think that this person is going to be a contributing member to our society? Well the answer obviously is no. That person will not be a contributing member to society because they will not contribute to a society that has not contributed back to them. It's just common sense, no politics.

So in Saskatchewan again, you go back to the same old saying, is we reap what we sow. If we do not begin to address some of these problems for some of these children, then we will reap what we sow. And as time goes on and on . . . And we're all not perfect parents. I'll admit that openly that I'm not a perfect parent. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can almost guarantee you

that if we do not begin to address these problems of social development, of poverty, then 10, 15, 20 years from now, we'll continue to care for these people, but it'll not be through welfare, it'll be through the jails. It'll be through the prison system.

So my point is, always remember when it comes to the issue of poverty, when it comes to the issue of children and families, the notion that every government should take is we reap what we sow. And if we're going to sow politics on this issue, you're going to end up with no results.

So I urge the members across not to get up and try and chastise one member of our caucus for expressing her opinion. We have a freedom of speech in this Assembly. We can present our views. We have that right to do. We don't have to necessarily agree with their views, but we don't get up and chastise them for their views. So all of a sudden we're being chastised that we believe in certain ideas when it comes to social justice and poverty and children.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it's very important we begin to look at our role, and once again we talk about ideas. You Liberals are always ranting and raving about all kinds of ideas; well let's hear them. Well okay, I'll tell you about them. I'll tell you about these ideas.

Well first of all in northern Saskatchewan, let's get rid of some of the disincentives associated with living in northern Saskatchewan. Did you know that if you're a working couple living in a social housing program, that if you got a job and got off welfare and your wife got a job and got off welfare, started instilling pride and a work ethic with their young children, all of a sudden the government comes along and says, oh, hold it, because you're both working, we're going to charge you 30 per cent of your gross income. And then we're going to also up your power rates and up your SaskTel rates and up every rate that you can find.

And all of a sudden that couple says, well what the heck's the use? Why should we begin to work? Every time we try and build ourselves up we get knocked down. So what's the issue here — are we addressing poverty or are we addressing control over people?

And again this is not about politics — this is about life. And if you want to make a difference, a difference to the people of northern Saskatchewan, then what you do is you don't say, well we have these grand ideas. You use ideas like this idea I hold in my hand, an idea that came from them. Let the people make the difference in their own life. Don't use politics. Don't come along and say, well your federal cousins . . . That's demeaning. That's insulting the intelligence of every voter out there.

Why is it that we haven't had a good turnout in voter elections, the last elections? Two thirds of the people voted, one-third stayed home. It's because we have come to a point where we haven't got any innovative and exciting government. And when you lack excitement and innovation, then this is where you begin to lose people's support and people's participation. This is very apparent, and this is the same attitude we should take when it comes to poverty.

And when I hear members across the floor yelling, oh you Liberals, you Liberals are so bad, well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was this Liberal caucus that contributed well over \$41,000 back from our personal pockets to the Saskatchewan people as a result of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) being overpaid as was the media's interpretation.

Did we hold that back? Did we hold that back? No. We paid it. Every one of us paid \$4,100 back to the province of Saskatchewan, and that money would be used, as we all say, for everybody. And was it paid? Eleven members of this Liberal caucus paid it back, and I want to commend them for that and they should be recognized for that. And enough said.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's very important that we . . . There's a lot more issues we want to talk about. I never spoke about my idea, but I know the community development model is a model we have to look at. A model in which the people are empowered to make decisions affecting families, and in certainly addressing the poverty issue. If we empower them, they will come up with their own ideas. We can simply support them.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you and I now adjourn . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I now will have my seat. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know the member would like to go on for ever, but the grass will be green — very, very green — if we let him go on. So I think it's time we move that this debate do now adjourn.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

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