

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of residents of the city of Saskatoon. The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

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

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to have the workers' compensation board Act amended whereby benefits and pensions are reinstated to disenfranchised widows and whereby all revoked pensions are reimbursed to them retroactive with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

These petitions come from the Kamsack, Saltcoats, Regina, all around Regina, Mr. Speaker, throughout Saskatchewan. I so present.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide sufficient funding to properly staff and operate the dialysis machine located in Yorkton.

The petitioners and signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the community of Spy Hill.

I so present.

Mr. Gantefer: — Mr. Speaker, I too rise on behalf of people of the province concerned about the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Signatures on this, Mr. Speaker, are from the city of Regina.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to present today:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to add chelation therapy to insured services covered under medicare.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The people that have signed this petition are from Hudson Bay, Kelvington, and Tisdale.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition as well to present to the Assembly this afternoon. The prayer is as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

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

This petition comes from the city of Regina, and residents that have signed it are exclusively from the city.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present a petition with reference to our well-known highways, and I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of the fuel tax revenues for road maintenance and construction so Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

I so present.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad you do. I'm happy to rise today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so that Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by the folks in the Arcola, Kisbey area. I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens that are concerned about the state of our roads and highways.

The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of

fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

Mr. Speaker, those who've signed these petitions are from communities of Balcarres, Sinaluta, and Indian Head. I so present.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues here today in bringing forward petitions.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that the Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call on federal and provincial governments to dedicate a significantly greater portion of the fuel tax revenues toward road maintenance and construction so Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will every pray.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed the petition are all from the Val Marie, Climax, Frontier, Shaunavon area of the province. I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition, the prayer of relief which reads as follows:

Your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to relocate the intersection of Highway 40 and Highway 16 in order to alleviate the unsafe congestion at the entrance to the city of North Battleford.

Your petitioners come from North Battleford. Thanks. I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to represent some citizens, concerned parents, and teachers in the province of Saskatchewan with their petition.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to provide essential funding and ensure the delivery of scientifically proven, diagnostic assessment and programming for children with learning disabilities in order that they have access to an education that meets their needs and allows them to reach their full potential.

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

The people who have signed this today, Mr. Speaker, are from Prince Albert and Christopher Lake, Saskatchewan.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act.

Also, additional ones, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Vehicle

Administration Amendment Act.

I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, (FREE VOTES).

And I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Recall of Members Act.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Health Districts Amendment Act, (Fully Elected Health Boards).

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Health Ombudsman Act.

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Health District Amendment Act, (Block Funding).

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Property Rights Act.

I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Government Accountability Act.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Balanced Budget, 1999 Act; and that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1999. I so present, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Regulatory Reform Act.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of Bills to present to the Assembly this afternoon. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement Revocation Act.

The second one is the . . . I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, a Crowns Corporations Amendment Act, 1999 (Foreign Investment Prohibition).

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move the first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Disclosure Act.

I give notice that on Thursday next I will move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Rate Review Act, 1999.

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporation Managers' and Permanent Heads' Salaries Act.

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Amendment Board of Directors Appointment Act.

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Amendment (Referendum) Act.

I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Accountability of Subsidiaries of Subsidiary Crown Corporations Act.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, I have two Bills to present. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Referendum and Plebiscite Amendment Act (Constitution Amendment Referendum).

I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1999. Thank you.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

And I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Public Inquiries Amendment Act, 1999.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Health Waiting List Elimination and Accountability Act.

I also give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Grain Elevators Sales Act.

And, additionally, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Farm-input Costs Monitoring Act.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill, The Nursing Shortage Elimination Act.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next as well move first reading of a Bill entitled The Preservation of Rural Hospitals Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. The hon. member will recognize that we've moved to a new agenda item. And I've called for introduction of guests.

I would need to have leave of the House to revert to that agenda item.

Mr. McPherson: — With leave to give reading of first . . .

The Speaker: — The Member from Wood River requests leave of the House to return to notices of motions and questions. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next move first reading of a Bill entitled Optimum Health Care Staffing Act.

Mr. Hillson: — My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I also request leave of this House to give notice of a Bill.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on Thursday next I will move first reading of a Bill entitled The Regional Hospitals Enhancement Act.

Ms. Haverstock: — Mr. Speaker, I too ask leave to give a notice of written question, please.

Leave granted.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 7 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Education: (1) what number of Saskatchewan children have been diagnosed as severely learning disabled in the years 1989 through to and including 1998; (2) will the minister provide documentation that the funding formula introduced in 1989, because of the growing numbers of severely learning disabled children, has indeed better served the educational needs of these children than the old formula; and (3) will the minister promptly table research that proves that the educational interventions offered in the province of Saskatchewan to severely learning disabled children are successful with an indication as to what measurements the Department of Education is using to determine success.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note today that in the gallery there's a group of people that I've met with on several occasions, the widows group, and I would just like to ask the Assembly to join me in welcoming them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We also would like to join in welcoming the group from the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group of Saskatchewan sitting in your gallery.

And I'd like to introduce them individually, and if they would stand as I call out their name please: Sharon Walker from Oxbow; Monique Fisher from Regina; Adeline Oystreck from Yorkton, and her husband Emmanuel; Leona Hertzog of Regina; Sharon Harde and her husband Keith from Estevan; Helen Marriott and her husband Ray, also from Estevan; Jean Martin from Estevan; Kay Clarke from Estevan; Janice Wervenuck of Regina; and Marion Ochitwa and her husband Ernest from Quill Lake. And also Brian Campbell, whose wife is a member of this group, and Judy, and was unable to attend today.

And I ask all members of the Assembly to welcome the group to the Assembly to observe our proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — On behalf of myself and my colleagues, I also wish to welcome the members of the disenfranchised widows group to the Assembly this afternoon, and I think it is appropriate at this time to also express condolences to the leader of that group, Mrs. Rose Polsom, on the death of her husband. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add my good wishes to this group of esteemed people who are visiting with us this afternoon, to not only welcome them but to say that it's most appropriate that they observe what transpires here since I think that there will be some things forthcoming in this legislative session that will be of great interest to them and they fought so very, very long for.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Saskatchewan Tourism

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon. The secret is out. Saskatchewan is an excellent place for a holiday. Tourism is our province's fastest growing industry.

At a recent meeting in Meadow Lake and Buffalo Narrows, Tourism Saskatchewan informed community members that the tourist industry generates more than \$1 billion annually, employs over 41,000 people, and will continue to grow.

For areas like Meadow Lake and the Cypress Hills Provincial Park, the challenge is to promote winter recreation. Activities like dogsledding, cross-country skiing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling — white gold, Mr. Speaker, things we take for granted or might think of as mundane — are exotic to non-Canadians.

Last year the Yorkton area saw a marked increase in both American and Canadian tourists, and inquiries are still on the increase.

Yorkton Tourism has its own Web site with links to and from Saskatchewan Tourism. As a result requests for information have come from as far away as Sweden and Wales. Nipawin and Hudson Bay in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, are a big part of the attractions to Saskatchewan.

Tourists are coming here for ecotourism; experience-based tourism; learning-based tourism; and culture-based, such as aboriginal-based tourism. The authentic experience is what visitors are looking for, Mr. Speaker, and Saskatchewan has that in abundance. Promote what you have, promote our special brand of . . .

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

Response to Throne Speech

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was trying to think of a suitable response to yesterday's display of NDP (New Democratic Party) propaganda, which was thinly disguised as a throne speech. However *Star-Phoenix* columnist Randy Burton summed it up far better than I could have done.

He said the NDP's respect for constituents Act is expressly designed to deflect attention from the government's record. This Act presumably supersedes the contempt for constituents Act in which politicians ask for your trust and then ignore them for four years.

He also called on the government to consider passing the respect for truth Act in which any minister found lying through his or her teeth would be forced to resign. Or how about the respect for health care Act under which anyone waiting longer than six months for an operation gets all-expense-paid trip to the Mayo Clinic.

Finally, Mr. Burton says he'd love to see the end to sanctimony Act in which the NDP would swear off pretending it's morally superior to anybody else.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier to take note. Mr. Burton has laid out a far more productive legislative agenda than the NDP blather we were forced to sit through yesterday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Education Week

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to advise the House that this is Education Week in Saskatchewan. The theme of this year is most appropriate: Learning Has No Limits.

Saskatchewan's education system is second to none. Together with our education partners, we are using innovative methods to meet the diverse needs of all Saskatchewan children. Our world-class core curriculum is contemporary, it is relevant, it is of high quality, it provides the basic skills and knowledge our children need now and in the future. Our excellent curriculum embraces diversity and technology.

This week a copy of the new Evergreen Curriculum CD-ROM is being presented to St. Mary's School in Yorkton and to teachers in training at the University of Regina. Over the next few weeks every classroom teacher, education student, and professor of education will receive their own copy of this valuable tool.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan schools have changed. More than ever the school is the hub of our communities. Today's schools integrate a variety of services and community resources to meet the full needs of the whole child. By working together we are ensuring Saskatchewan children have the skills, knowledge, and support they need to lead happy, productive lives now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the constituents of Lloydminster have a high regard for good education. On their behalf, I recognize

Education Week.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hospital Occupancy Rate in Carrot River

Mr. McLane: — “What on earth are you people in Regina thinking? What are you going to do with the elderly and other patients who use this facility?” Those are the first lines of a letter, Mr. Speaker, sent to the Finance minister from K. Alfred Sauder, president of the Carrot River Legion Branch No. 186.

The Carrot River hospital has an occupancy rate of 10 beds. The Health minister has encouraged people to take their concerns to the North-East Health District. However, Mr. Sauder points out the majority of health board members are appointed by the NDP government to carry out the NDP agenda.

Local media were told the health board and planning committee made the decision to close the Carrot River hospital. However Sauder points out in his letter, a letter from former Health minister Clay Serby, stating the status quo is not an option.

It is obvious the North-East Health District has no say in the matter when it is the Health minister calling the shots in closing the Carrot River hospital. However when our veterans who fought to defend our country and its freedoms must write and plead with the government which sent them off to war, to leave the hospital and special care home as they are currently operating it, it is obvious the government has broken faith with those who defended our country.

I salute these proud veterans and Mr. Sauder for showing the courage they displayed in defence of their country and are showing again in defence of their communities.

Their sacrifice should not be forgotten or ignored by those who serve the public in this House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to Shymko Curling Team

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to extend my hearty congratulations and message to Saskatchewan's representatives at the Edmonton Brier and to Gerald Shymko and the team out of Yorkton.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — The team, Gerald Shymko at skip, Gerry Adam in third, Arnie Geisler in second, Neil . . . or second Arnie Geisler and lead Neil Cursons put on an excellent display of curling and sportsmanship. Mr. Shymko was in fact voted the most sportsmanlike player by his fellow curlers.

As for curling, well yes they came in third, but overall in Canada, Mr. Speaker. And during the round robin they defeated the former Canadian and world champion Russ Howard of New Brunswick, and Jeff Stoughton of Manitoba.

They defeated Russ Howard's team again in the playoffs and

forced the Quebec skip to make a miracle-like draw to win and go on to the final. Shymko, known in our part of the world as the friendly giant, and as the TSN (The Sports Network) people called him, the friendly green giant, announced as his nickname, and the rest of his team, put on a tremendous show. They gave us much to cheer about and we're very proud of them in Saskatchewan.

And Saskatchewan showed its pride as well. Former Saskatchewan residents from as far away as Australia sent faxes and e-mails to cheer the team on. Ten busloads of curling fans of Saskatchewan made their way to the event of the Shymko game against British Columbia. They went to support our team and to celebrate the 2000 Brier in Saskatoon.

In the 70-year history of the Brier, no other team has ever brought 500 ambassadors to a province for the next Brier.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Mr. Shymko and the entire team in making Saskatchewan . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's seldom that I agree with the member for Yorkton but I'm afraid in this case I have to wholeheartedly.

I would also like to congratulate the Gerald Shymko rink, our Saskatchewan 1999 men's curling champion for their showing at the Brier in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Gerald farms in the Saltcoats constituency near the community of Calder. Gerald Shymko, Gerry Adam, Arnie Geisler, Neil Cursons, and Steve Sobkow went to Edmonton, first trip to the Brier, and performed admirably. Not only their curling ability and their great shot making, but also the class and great sportsmanship they displayed on and off the ice whether they won or lost.

I believe the friendly giant, as the media so aptly named Gerald and his rink, made me feel very proud to be a Saskatchewanite and I also believe made every other curling fan in the province feel the same way. Gerald was also named the most sportsmanlike curler at the Brier by the fellow curlers from every province.

So again I congratulate Gerald, Gerry, Arnie, Neil, and Steve for making us all feel good about being from Saskatchewan. And I know it will be hard to repeat next year out of Saskatchewan, but we are all pulling for your rink, and I know you have the ability to win it all. Thanks for brightening a long, cold winter.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

National Aboriginal Achievement Awards

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to mention the sixth National Aboriginal Achievement Awards hosted here in the city on Friday night. Since 1993 these awards have recognized diverse career achievement by Aboriginal

professionals.

Recognizing initiative, achievement, and selflessness is a long-standing Aboriginal habit. The efforts of any individual who furthers the well-being of the collective has been respected and celebrated from the past to the present.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — This year, Mr. Speaker, five of the fourteen National Aboriginal Achievement Award recipients were from Saskatchewan. They include:

Dr. Allan Sapp of the Red Pheasant First Nation — a nationally and internationally renowned artist. He received a lifetime achievement award.

Theresa Stevenson of the Cowessess First Nation, founder of the Regina's Chili for Children. Mrs. Stevenson received the award for community development.

Dr. Lillian Eva Dyck, of the Gordon First Nation, received the award for science. She is a neuropsychiatrist, and a full professor at the University of Saskatchewan's department of psychiatry.

Dr. Howard Adams, a Metis, received the award for education. Dr. Howard is the first Metis to earn a Ph.D. and has been a long human rights activist.

Alika LaFontaine, a Metis, was the youth award winner. At 16 years of age, Mr. LaFontaine is in his first year of pre-med at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. His goal is to become a cardiologist with a specialty in cancer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hospital Closures

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, last year in this House the Premier of Saskatchewan wagged his finger at the opposition — he wagged his finger at the people of Saskatchewan. He said, when the Plains hospital is closed, not one bed will be closed in Regina. Of course that wasn't true.

Now the Premier is running around wagging his finger and saying not one rural hospital will be closed.

Mr. Premier, why would anyone believe you? Your associate minister has admitted the NDP plans to close more hospitals. All we want to know is which ones are you going to close, Mr. Premier. Stand up and tell the truth. Which hospitals are you going to close? Which hospitals are the NDP going to close?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we're not going to close any rural hospitals.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the minister says they're not going to close any hospitals. Well that certainly is a different story than what the B team minister was saying earlier. They're going to convert hospitals though, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd like to talk about the NDP record. And the minister says, zap, you're frozen — 52 rural hospitals, zap, you're closed. The Plains hospital, zap, you're closed. Sixty-four more beds in Regina — zap, you're closed.

That's the NDP record, Mr. Premier. The people of Saskatchewan want to know, who are you going to zap next? Are you going to zap the Carrot River Hospital? Are you going to zap the Hafford hospital? Are you going to zap the Wolseley hospital, or are you going to zap St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker? Who's next on your hit list? Which hospitals are you going to zap next?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I do note with some interest that the Tory Party issued a press release indicating a number of hospitals that had an average daily census of less than 10 hospital beds. What I found so interesting, Mr. Speaker, on this list of hospital beds that they say are up for closure, I have another list of hospital beds that we have improved. For instance I think the member from Wood River will know that at the Shaunavon Hospital we are building a facility to integrate long-term care and acute care beds.

Mr. Speaker, in Davidson we are going to build an integrated facility with hospital beds. In Wynyard we're going to have hospital beds. In Balcarres . . . What's interesting, Balcarres is on this list, and what do you know, Mr. Speaker; it includes six acute care beds or hospital beds along with 43 long-term care beds.

Mr. Speaker, my point is that we all know we're getting ready for an election, and these guys . . .

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

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know why the Premier doesn't get up and answer these questions. The Premier, though, seems to be more interested in the Saskatchewan Party platform than he is in his own record. The Premier should actually read our platform or have Brian Topp do it for him. And it says we should take all the new health money from Ottawa and put it into front-line services. It says and I quote:

This would result in an additional one hundred million dollars a year for Saskatchewan health care, money that

would be provided directly to health districts to improve front-line services.

On top of that, Mr. Premier, we would provide a further increase to health care funding at the rate of inflation which is about the rate of increase you have provided, that you have provided for the last seven years. So why don't you start telling the truth about our platform, and start telling the truth about the NDP's record — hospital closures, bed closures, nurses leaving, record waiting lists. Mr. Premier . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order, order, order. The hon. member didn't get his question on the record because he was very long in his preamble. And I'll allow him just a few seconds to put his question on the record. The hon. member for Cannington — very, very briefly.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Premier, tell the truth — which hospitals will you be closing?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, note what the Sask-a-Tory party is advocating — massive tax cuts, massive tax cuts. They're going to cut taxes right across the board. They're going to spend money like crazy they say. They say that they're going to be doing this, they're going to be doing that. Does this sound familiar? Does it sound like the Devine Tories of the 1980s? You betcha it sounds like the Devine Tories.

Now on health care what the member up there says is this. They're going to expand health care by the rate of inflation which means a freeze, Mr. Speaker. Means no increase — it means just the rate of inflation. You elect the Sask-a-Tories, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the people of Saskatchewan — zap! Health care is frozen under the Tories.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the Premier has his zapping finger out again. I'm afraid for all of the hospitals in Saskatchewan. His comments though remind me of the by-election in Assiniboia where he and his colleagues ran around saying the government of the day was going close every hospital in that constituency. They got elected and did it.

Mr. Premier, another piece of misinformation about the Saskatchewan Party you've been spreading is our opposition to the Canada Health Act. Our founding convention . . . the Saskatchewan Party members passed a resolution saying that we will continue to ensure and enhance the five principles of the Canada Health Act.

One of those principles is accessibility. Remember that one, Mr. Premier? It's your NDP government that's violating the principle of accessibility. People are spending months or years on waiting lists waiting for critical surgeries. People in rural Saskatchewan are hundreds of miles from 24-hour service.

You're the one who's violating the Canada Health Act. And now your associate minister is promising to close more rural hospitals.

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Now the hon. member has been extremely lengthy again in his preamble and I'll give him just a very small number of seconds to put his question directly.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Minister, immediately after question period, the Saskatchewan Party will be calling for an emergency debate on the future of rural hospitals. Will you allow that debate to take place?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the House will decide what emergency debates will or will not take place under the guidance of the Speaker and the rules of the House, there's no doubt about that.

I have said that the Saskatchewan Party, the Sask-a-Tory party, believes in freezing — freezing — any new spending, additional spending, to health care. I do so, and it's proven by the very words of the member from Cannington.

But there's more than that. The leader of the Sask-a-Tory party went to a conference in Ottawa, joining his Reform Party colleagues of old, and came back and gave an interview — and I've got the quotation — on CKRM. Here it is. In praising what he heard down there, he said the following:

Hermanson also likes one of the new party's first proposals, to have the federal government surrender its responsibility for health care to the provinces.

That means zap! — no more Canada Health Act. Zap! You've frozen out health care. That's what you Tories stand for.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nursing Shortage

Ms. Draude: — My question is for the junior Minister Of Health. Madam Minister, your former colleagues . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Now this is . . . Order! Order. It is question period and questions are to be directed to ministers, obviously, and I'll ask the hon. members to refer to ministers appropriately by their titles.

Ms. Draude: — As the associate minister, your former colleagues at the nurses' union are wondering just what you've been doing since the Premier bought the Saskatoon Eastview by-election for you.

First the NDP buys you off with the promise of a cabinet position. Then the NDP buys the by-election for you with the promise of 200 new nursing positions.

Madam Minister, please explain to the people of Saskatchewan how it is possible that right after being elected on the promise of 200 new nursing positions, your NDP government discovers that Saskatchewan is facing a massive nursing shortage.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the government and the ministers of Health have articulated the posture with respect to nursing. The nursing shortage is a shortage which exists partly nationwide, I would argue in large measure, due to the fact that

there was a \$6 billion cut in the block transfer payments occasioned by the federal Liberal government's approach since 1995.

But that doesn't matter. I welcome the fact that under the social union we have 2.5 billion now restored back to health care. And every penny of Saskatchewan's share of that 2.5 billion is going to go into the health care budget, plus more — on budget day the details will be announced. This government is committed to doing all that it can in getting the very best of nursing assistance for the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, my question has been for the Associate Minister of Health. Madam Minister, nurses are wondering today if they are getting any value for the money the NDP spent getting you elected. In fact, Madam Minister, if there was ever a walking billboard for the need of a full value-for-money audit of the health care system, I believe you're it.

Madam Minister, just two months ago the Regina Health District announced it was shutting down 64 hospital beds. Why? Because they were short 150 nurses and they couldn't ensure the safety of the patients. And what was the Health minister's response? She said it was the first she'd heard about it. There was no way she could've anticipated a massive shortage of nurses. She wasn't sure that there was going to be a shortage until the year 2011. And who is supposed to know if you don't?

Madam Minister, what are you doing about the massive nursing shortage your NDP government has inflicted on the people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the member may know, there are nursing recruitment problems all across the country. And in fact there are nursing recruitment problems in North America. And, if you watch the Internet, there are nursing recruitment problems across the world.

Our government is committed to providing a stable and secure nursing workforce in the future. That's why, Mr. Speaker, last spring we announced the \$9 million for 195 nursing positions in the province of Saskatchewan to assist those nurses in the workplace. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we added 59 spaces to the registered nursing program at SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) last September. And that's why we added several spaces to the licensed practical nurses.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Regina Health District is in the process of recruiting nurses. They are advertising; they are going to fairs across the country. And I can report to the members that the Regina Health District has hired over 34 nurses in the last month, and they . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Associate Minister of Health. So we hear that they're busy recruiting nurses, and we have to ask from where. Alberta? They just lowered their taxes again and the government has committed \$1 billion more to health care.

How about from Ontario? Well here's a news flash for you. The Government of Ontario has just committed to hiring 10,000 new nurses. And Ontario has the second lowest taxes in all of Canada.

Meanwhile back in NDP Saskatchewan, with the second highest taxes in Canada and a health care system that's in crisis according to everyone but you, we have a Health minister that didn't know there was a nursing shortage and a government that doesn't know what to do about it.

Madam Minister, how many more hospital beds are in danger of closing because of the nursing shortage that the NDP incompetence has created in this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'd like to report to the member that in fact the Regina Health District has recruited nurses from Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, British Columbia, Ontario, South Dakota, Vermont, Montana. And they are recruiting nurses from California and Texas.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Operating Theatre in Moosomin Hospital

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community of Moosomin last had an operating room service in 1993 when the local general practitioner sold his practice to move southern Ontario.

After years of work by the community, the Moosomin Royal Canadian Legion branch raised money for equipment, and both the legion and Moosomin district health care foundation will cover start-up and operating costs for the operating room for one year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as the Associate Minister of Health said there will be fewer rural Saskatchewan hospitals, we have here an example where rural people are willing to help maintain services that this government does not want to provide.

Madam Minister, is this just another example of your department saying on one hand it's providing health services rural people need, yet when rural people ask for services they aren't getting, your government is refusing to help them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member probably doesn't know, I did have the opportunity to meet with the Moosomin town council. The member from Moosomin is aware of this situation.

We have indicated to the people of Moosomin and surrounding area that the decision whether or not to reopen the operating

theatre was up to the Pipestone Health District. That approval has been given. We've indicated that we will need to go through an evaluation process to determine the quality of procedures that are provided on a . . . I believe that they're going to open it for one day for two hours each week. We will evaluate that, and at the end of the process we'll make a decision whether or not to continue funding.

The other point I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that the physician from Moosomin, as part of our rural physician retention program and recruitment program was able through the auspices of the provincial government to do a subspecialty in anesthesia. And that's one of the reasons why Moosomin has been able to reopen its operating theatre because of the rural specialists' program that this government introduced in order to get specialists to rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again there the government's going out and talking to people and then just ignoring what they're having to say to them.

The Health minister, Mr. Speaker, is quoted in the Moosomin *World Spectator* as saying funding will come for this project in 2000-2001.

Madam Minister, why does the Pipestone Health District have a file . . . a letter on file from Saskatchewan Health saying the department will not consider ongoing funding for the project?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I know that two-tier Arm River will do anything he can to get his name in the paper because I know that he doesn't really believe in medicare, so he is trying to do a good job of raising issues.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I met with the town council of Moosomin. We had an excellent meeting. That community has raised the funds necessary to reopen that operating theatre one day a week, I believe for two hours.

This government, through its rural specialists' program, was involved in providing funds for that physician in Moosomin to get his subspecialty training. Mr. Speaker, we're pleased that he is able to provide those services to Moosomin.

Those services will be evaluated and I could assure the member that depending upon the outcome of that evaluation that this government will be there to make sure that these kinds of procedures are done in the Moosomin hospital.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I believe the rural speciality program of the NDP is tearing out all health care services in rural Saskatchewan is about what it amounts to. Mr. Speaker, the Premier admitted yesterday there were mistakes made in health care through insufficient community consultations and promised to correct those mistakes in the future. Evidently, Mr. Speaker, he didn't pass that message on to his cabinet.

Madam Minister, can you explain why the Health department and district have ignored for six years the demand from residents of Moosomin, south-eastern Saskatchewan, and indeed Manitoba for an increase in surgical services in Moosomin?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — What the member may or may not know is that in order for physicians to be involved in surgical procedures, Mr. Speaker, it's important that they have additional training beyond family physician status. Now what I can say to the member, speaking of our commitment to rural Saskatchewan, we have seen a tremendous increase in physicians in this province.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, we've had some very successful programs. And in fact, we have seen more rural physicians in rural Saskatchewan today than we did a year ago. And I think that's positive, Mr. Speaker.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we're providing bursaries to our College of Medicine graduates — bursaries — so that they can get their College of Medicine training. And you know what? Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent, the largest percentage ever of those family medicine graduates, are staying right here in Saskatchewan and going to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have programs to encourage rural physicians to go to rural Saskatchewan — and they're going, Mr. Speaker. And we have money for those family physicians in rural Saskatchewan to get subspecialties like anesthesia and general . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question, next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, the government has money but they have money for all the wrong things.

Mr. Speaker, the Pipestone Health District supported an application for a provincial bursary for anesthetics training for Dr. David Kirsch in Moosomin, yet does not support reopening operating room services in Moosomin.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why the health district would make such an illogical decision, unless it was to encourage Dr. David Kirsch to move away from Moosomin and further reduce the number of doctors working there from five to four.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — I'm going to talk about the \$1.8 billion that we spend on health care in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that 4.6 million visits are made to a family physician every year in this province — 4.6 million? Do you know that there are 925,000 visits to a specialist each year in this province. Do you know that we have 9,200 nursing beds in the province of Saskatchewan?

Do you know that 28,000 people receive home care services from the people of this province through our tax dollars? Do you know that we have 650,000 emergency room visits each year in the province of Saskatchewan?

And Mr. Speaker, 72,000 trips by road ambulance and over 800 trips by air ambulance, Mr. Speaker; 5,000 MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) visits, Mr. Speaker, 5,000 MRI visits and 46,000 CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans; 400,000 immunizations and over 1.4 million tests.

Mr. Speaker, I think that is a phenomenal amount of service to the people of this province coming from a \$1.8 billion budget.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Plains Health Centre Closure Costs

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Premier. Mr. Premier, last October the NDP continued its policy of closing hospitals by nailing the doors shut at the Plains hospital. Even after the Premier of this province wagged his finger at every person in this province and gave his solemn promise that not one bed would be lost. But, Mr. Speaker, the Premier wasn't telling the truth, and he knew it.

Mr. Speaker, seven weeks ago . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. The hon. member will recognize that to accuse another hon. member of intentionally not telling the truth is not acceptable in the conduct of debate. And I will ask him to withdraw the remark and apologize to the House.

Mr. Boyd: — I would withdraw that comment, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — And I ask the hon. member to apologize to the House.

Mr. Boyd: — And I also apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, seven weeks ago 64 hospital beds were closed in Regina, thanks to the NDP government's failing health reforms. On top of that, the Regina Health District documents indicate that the cost of closing the Plains hospital is running as much as \$40 million over budget — \$40 million, Mr. Speaker — because of NDP waste and mismanagement.

Mr. Premier, taxpayers deserve to know why. Will you stop hiding the truth and support a full investigation into the \$40 million cost overrun the NDP has incurred in closing the Plains hospital?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will say this to the member opposite. It is true, Mr. Speaker, that the cost of consolidating services into the Regina General and the Pasqua Hospital will be about \$95 million, Mr. Speaker.

Now what the member has failed to add, Mr. Speaker, is the

fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have a burn unit that's been added; we have a second cardiac lab that's been added; dialysis, eye clinic, diabetes education, nuclear medicine, therapy satellite, women's health centre, Mr. Speaker — all added. We have MRIs, mental health.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to say to the members opposite is that people in Regina are going to have better health services — better health services. And let me say this, Mr. Speaker, one man by the name of Gordon Boyd said, I think this facility is second to none. When I arrived here an hour after my mother came out of open heart surgery I was impressed to see the degree of technology, the degree of care. There didn't . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member for North Battleford on his feet?

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker, by leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I ask all hon. members to join with me in welcoming to the Assembly this afternoon a long-time member of this Assembly, Mr. Eiling Kramer. Thank you, and member for North Battleford.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, may I beg the indulgence of you and the House just to simply support and underline the words of my colleague from North Battleford.

I've served in the House with Eiling Kramer. It's my pleasure to . . .

The Speaker: — The Premier requests leave. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I've served with Eiling Kramer; no tougher a debater; no more principled a speaker; no more better a politician than Eiling Kramer, and I also want to welcome him back to this House. Welcome back, Eiling.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member for Arm River on his feet?

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 46, I seek leave of the Assembly to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity.

The Speaker: — Order, order. The appropriate time for that would be under Orders of the Day, and we're not there yet. The

request for leave is out of order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 46, I seek leave of the Assembly to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity.

The Speaker: — The hon. member for Arm River wishes to introduce a motion under rule 46.

I'll ask the hon. member for Arm River to very, very briefly state why he believes that this matter of urgent and pressing necessity should come before the House, and to briefly advise the House of the motion he wishes to introduce.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I might read the motion, I think that might be explanatory enough for the Assembly.

That this Assembly call upon the government to immediately stop the destruction of rural health care taking place this day through attempts by larger districts who are today calling, advertising, and trying to draw rural nurses and health workers from their communities, and by the great uncertainty among staff and rural hospitals created by the Associate Minister of Health's comments that there will be fewer rural hospitals, by firstly adopting a comprehensive recruitment strategy to ensure all areas of Saskatchewan, both rural and urban, have optimum levels of health care staff, and secondly, providing an immediate and firm commitment today that they will not cut acute care services in small rural hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I think if we just look across Saskatchewan today, the necessity of this debate will be quite self-evident. I so move, seconded by Mr. Aldridge.

The Speaker: — Two minor problems. You should ought not to refer to the hon. member by his proper name, but also the motion cannot be introduced unless leave is granted. Is leave granted?

Leave not granted.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today before Orders of the Day to seek leave of the Assembly to move a series of routine motions which it is a tradition to move after the throne speech and a motion in regards to the absence of a member.

The Speaker: — The House has heard the nature of a series of motions that the Government House Leader wishes to introduce. Is leave granted to receive the whole series of motions?

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Referral of Report to the

Standing Committee on Communication

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That the report of the Saskatchewan Legislative Library be referred as tabled in the present session to the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Retention and Disposal Schedules to the Standing Committee on Communication

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That the retention and disposal schedules approved under The Archives Act by the Public Documents Committee be referred as tabled to the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Reports of the Provincial Auditor to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That the various reports of the Provincial Auditor as tabled in the present session be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of *Public Accounts* to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That the *Public Accounts* of the province of Saskatchewan as tabled in the present session be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

(1430)

Referral of Bylaws and Amendments to the Special Committee on Regulations

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That the bylaws of the professional associations and amendments thereto, the bylaws and amendments that are tabled in the present session, be referred to the Special Committee on Regulations.

Motion agreed to.

Leave of Absence for Member to Attend Conference

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Prince Albert Carlton:

That leave of absence be granted to the member for Regina Northeast from Monday, March 15, 1999 to Friday, March 19, 1999 inclusive, in order to attend the Conference on the Establishment of a Multiparty National Vietnamese Parliament to be held in Hanoi, Vietnam as a delegate on behalf of the Canadian Parliamentary Centre and this Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask leave of the House to introduce motions dealing with substitutions on standing committees.

Leave granted.

Substitution of Name on Standing Committee on Agriculture

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Canora-Pelly:

That the name of Bob Bjornerud be substituted for that of Mr. Bill Boyd on the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

I move, seconded by the member from Saltcoats:

That the name of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order, order. The hon. member will recognize that it is not in order to replace a motion when there's a motion before the Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Name on Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Saltcoats:

That the name of Mr. Bill Boyd be substituted for that of Mr. Ben Heppner on the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

Motion agreed to.

Substitution of Name on Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Saltcoats:

The name of Ms. Arlene Julé be substituted for that of Ms. June Draude on the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

The Speaker: — The hon. member for Cannington requests to introduce a motion under rule 46.

I'll ask the hon. member for Cannington to very, very briefly describe to the House why he believes it's a matter of urgent and pressing necessity to set aside the normal business of the House, and then also to very briefly advise the House of the nature of the motion he wishes to introduce.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last month the assistant Health minister has made statements in and out of this building with reference to the future of Saskatchewan hospitals. These statements have left the people of Saskatchewan confused and fearful that the NDP has another round of hospital closures ready to go.

Just to refresh memories, here's a couple of the things that were said by the associate minister. "Eventually we'll see fewer hospitals than we have now", February 22, 1999. Another quote: "What a hospital is defined as now is something we are not . . ."

The Speaker: — Order, order, Order. It strikes the Chair that the hon. member is introducing material which is more of the nature of the debate itself that he would get into if the House provides leave.

And I'll ask him to make his final very brief comment and then advise the House of the nature of the motion he wishes to introduce.

Mr. D'Autremont: — I believe the people of Saskatchewan and the members of this Assembly recognize the chaos that is occurring in health care across Saskatchewan, particularly in rural Saskatchewan with the concerns about the further closures of hospitals, particularly in rural Saskatchewan but not necessarily limited to rural Saskatchewan. We believe that we need to debate that issue immediately, before further difficulties arise in Saskatchewan.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a motion to that effect:

That this Assembly urges the provincial government to abandon any plans for further reductions in acute care services in the province and further hospital closures in rural or urban Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I have noted the desire of the hon. member from Cannington to introduce a motion of urgent and pressing necessity, his reasons for that and the nature of the motion. Leave is required. Is leave granted?

Leave not granted.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr. Jess: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to acknowledge the honour I am receiving today by being the first to rise in debate after the reading of the throne speech.

Mr. Speaker, at the conclusion of my remarks I will be moving the acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, because of your own commitment to the democratic process and the respectful manner in which you perform your duties to not only this Chamber but also to the people of Saskatchewan as you fulfill your duties, that you would permit me a few moments to express my respect for the Honourable Lieutenant Governor as he performs his role as the Queen's representative.

I have served this legislature for over seven years now, and I must say that the hon. lieutenant governors have continually brought honour and respect to the institution and the British parliamentary system as a whole.

To His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I thank you for providing us with the message of hope that you delivered yesterday in the throne speech.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Mr. Speaker, as I begin my remarks, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome my colleagues, who are ready to do the people's business with dedication, with decorum, with decency, and with excellent debate.

I would particularly like to welcome the new Associate Minister of Health after her successful by-election victory in Saskatoon Eastview . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Invite her to her first full session. She follows a member and a good friend, Mr. Bob Pringle.

I also want to extend my congratulations to the new member from Athabasca. We not only have a new member, we also have a renewed member. The member from Athabasca who took the proper and honourable path of resigning his seat, seeking the nomination of our party, and taking his decision to the voters for approval.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — The right decision obviously since 94 per cent of the voters approved. He is the only member twice elected this term. And I expect that he will improve his percentage each time he goes to the electorate.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to officially say farewell to two members who have honoured this legislature by their service and inspired us all by their dedication and wisdom. It is exceptional being able to use their names in debate because that tells us they are truly retired.

But I do want to say that Ed Tchorzewski and Bob Mitchell were dedicated partisans to the principles of the New Democratic Party and to the policies of this government, as our system demands they be. But in the true parliamentary tradition they were adherents of legislative democracy, of the dignity and traditions of this House.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to mention how pleased I am to rise in this Chamber as a member of the government caucus to once again represent the good people of Redberry Lake constituency.

In many ways Redberry Lake is a very typical Saskatchewan constituency; one that mirrors the comments of His Honour in his speech. It is a constituency that still is dependent on the basic industry identified with Saskatchewan — the family farm. It is a constituency bordered by urban areas where newer, less traditional industries are established. It is rural but the city is near; tradition and innovation side by side.

Redberry Lake not only includes the lake but also is spanned by the North Saskatchewan River from the Silver Grove district east of Leask to west of Denholm. It stretches from Rabbit Lake in the north-west to Mistawasis Reserve in the north-east to the Monarchvale district in the south-west to the Perdue area and the hamlet of Feudal in the south, with Pike Lake Provincial Park in the south-east.

I serve over 17,000 people spread over an area of 4,800 square miles, that's including 26 towns and villages, 15 rural municipalities, plus Muskeg Lake and Mistawasis Reserves. My largest town in the most rural of all rural seats is Langham. My office is situated in the town of Hafford, just slightly north of the constituency's geographical centre.

I want to say something about our tradition. Our Saskatchewan tradition is based on co-operation as His Honour has said. We recognize and encourage the efforts of the individual. At the same time we have known from the beginning that in this imposing land of great distances and extreme conditions, the key to survival is co-operation.

The good people of Redberry Lake are very innovative, whether it be developing small business, diversifying their farms, or responding to the needs of the elderly, such as at Rabbit Lake and presently at Borden as they explore new avenues to provide housing for the care of the elderly.

Redberry Lake boasts a large number of Doukhobors and Doukhobor descendants. And 1999 marks 100 years of Doukhobor settlement in North America. And many of those settlers' descendants reside in my constituency, descendants of those who settled in this area a century ago.

(1445)

We also have a wide selection of almost all nationalities represented — German, Ukrainian, Polish, French, Belgium, Dutch, English, Scottish, Irish, and many others, mostly of agrarian background from wherever they came, with several Hutterite colonies and two reserves inhabited by First Nations people mainly of Cree heritage — a vast mosaic of all people.

As I mentioned, not only do these people live in harmony, each bringing their own traditions, but also they are innovative. Innovation, Mr. Speaker, has been the watchword of the people of Saskatchewan and of this government of the people of Saskatchewan.

The good citizens of Redberry Lake are proud of their roots deep in the fertile grain-growing soil of Saskatchewan but they know that those roots have spread and evolved. We are no longer just an agricultural community though we are proud to have our society still based on our farm economy.

Mr. Burke, a renowned parliamentarian, said, and I quote:

Nothing in progression can rest on its original plan. We may as well think of rocking a grown man in the cradle of an infant.

Mr. Speaker, the original plan for Saskatchewan in the pioneer days gave every settler a quarter section. They brought in turn a plough, a strong back, maybe an ox, and the faith and hope mentioned in the throne speech. The original plan was good for a start and it took us a long way.

But the oxen are gone, the quarter section farm is gone, and my back is not as strong as it used to be. The land is changed. People have changed. Saskatchewan has changed to meet the realities of a changing world. The signs are all about us.

In a minute I want to say a word about the current agricultural situation we face — a situation created by international pricing far beyond our control.

Mr. Speaker, even ten years ago the downturn in grain and oil prices we are now experiencing would have virtually finished us off. The old boom and bust cycle we have suffered under for most of this century would have ground our economy to a halt. But that is not the case.

We are having a tough time for the moment, I grant you that. But we are weathering it because, as Burke says, we have evolved from the original plan.

Our economy is diversified, and even with the current problems we face, it is growing. And it will continue to grow, returning to the rapid growth it experienced in the last six years.

We have an active high-tech agri-food industry in Saskatoon which is providing jobs and value-added products. We have high-tech industries in both Saskatoon and Regina which are keeping us in the forefront of the communications era.

In towns and small cities around the province, small and large companies are building innovative agriculture implements which are being shipped around the world. Farmers are growing specialty crops and organic grains as well as wheat. Other farmers are raising elk and bison as well as cattle and hogs.

Everywhere you look, Mr. Speaker, our people are using the same initiative that created the threshing bee to adapt our economy to today's reality and tomorrow's possibilities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — A temporary downturn in one area is not going to stop it. What do I base my confidence on, Mr. Speaker? That's simple. On the record of this government and these people and what they have achieved since 1992.

During the years between '92 and '97, Saskatchewan's real growth averaged 4.3 per cent annually, which far exceeded the national average. And the Bank of Montreal predicts that in 1999 our economy will continue to grow, even with depressed farm prices.

During the same time period the manufacturing sector created 7,300 new jobs. Retail trade increased by 45 per cent, far ahead of both of our provincial neighbours. The value of manufacturing shipment was up by 76 per cent. New capital investment increased by 63 per cent. Housing starts grew by 30 per cent. Mr. Speaker, year-end figures for 1998 from Statistics Canada showed total employment for the year was at an all-time high.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — That number of full-time jobs that increased by more than 7,000 over the previous year. I know that the members opposite hate to hear this, but all this was accomplished while taxes were lowered, the Tory debt was reduced, and the budget was balanced five consecutive times.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — The sixth is just around the corner. I said that too fast, Mr. Speaker. Let me slow down a bit. We had started with a Tory debt of \$14,000 for every man, every woman, and every child in this province. Fifteen billion dollars. That figure is now well under 12 billion. And that is without the help of Mr. Hermanson's former reform assistant, Mr. Truscott, and his taxpayers' federation.

We have cut taxes in every budget since 1992, not just the two splashy ones, the two per cent sales tax cut and the two per cent reduction in the personal income tax rate. Every budget. You can check it out.

We have balanced the budget five straight times before any Tory government in Canada, before any Liberal government in Canada, and before any separatist government in Canada. We were the first to balance it and we have maintained it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Some good luck, a lot of good management, a lot of innovation, and a lot of initiative. Working together the Saskatchewan way — that's what will get results and it will get results this year as well.

As the most rural of rural constituencies, Redberry Lake is home to hundreds of farm families, many of whom are having a struggle to make ends meet. These farmers appreciate the efforts of our agricultural minister in his negotiations to provide farm support, not only today but also in the future as we face unfair subsidy wars.

I am pleased therefore that we have the Premier we do, that we

have the Minister of Agriculture that we do, and that we have the government that we do as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — We are responding as a government to help solve the current farm crisis just as we acted in the beginning to solve the financial crisis left us by the previous Tory government.

Over time the federal government has gone from taking the major responsibility for safety nets and disaster type of funding to a position of requiring provinces to pay 40 per cent of the cost. During the same period of time the federal government has taken away major programs that help Saskatchewan, such as the two-price wheat system and the Crow rate.

Farmers have in the past and still continue to face a number of challenges: international subsidies funded by the national treasuries of Europe and the United States, declining margin as input costs eat up more of their revenue, and continued production and price risks associated with farming. Farmers need to know whether the federal government will stand behind them or if they have to address these issues on their own.

Farmers also want to know if the federal government will continue to download 40 per cent of the responsibility onto the provinces. A province like Saskatchewan with a large agricultural base and a small tax base is at a disadvantage in this environment.

The farm situation has become very tough for some of us — most of us in fact — because of the sabotage of our industry by Ottawa, approximately 320 million each and every year with the demise of the Crow — a cross now borne by Saskatchewan farmers alone. Just look at your last grain cheque — the freight costs are formidable. And now Justice Estey wants to remove the cap.

Somehow this is supposed to help. It will, I'm sure. But it won't help you and I unless we happen to own a piece of CP (Canadian Pacific) or CN (Canadian National). What it will do is allow the grain companies and the railways the ability to finish redrawing the map of Saskatchewan, a map that is only for their own economic advantage.

The grain will then have to go to the main line, and only to the delivery points chosen by the railways and the elevator companies. And I think that's important enough that I should mention it again, that even on the main lines, with the map that they're drawing, none of these communities are safe. They are drawing them to the points chosen by the railways and the elevator companies for their advantage.

We have nobody to thank for that but successive Liberal and Conservative governments in Ottawa.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — We are told that it is all done in the name of efficiency. Efficient? Yes. But efficient for whom? The costs of transportation will be ours as farmers, and the costs of the roads and the highways will be ours as taxpayers.

Over the last number of years Ottawa has taken away the two-price system for wheat, which was one small way that at least the flour and the domestic consumer's bread was paid for. That support is gone for good. It has become another victim of a cheap food policy.

Ottawa could still be putting hundreds of millions of dollars into farm programs without violating their trade agreement. For example, the federal government is renegeing on the duty to farmers to phase out subsidies equivalent to other countries'. We could still be receiving the full Crow benefit and not be out of step with Europe or the United States, and not in violation of any agreement of any kind.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Our provincial government's commitment to agriculture is significant. For example, the PST (provincial sales tax) exemption on farm machinery and repairs, fertilizer, pesticide, and seed, amount to an investment of \$127.4 million annually. As well as the exemptions on the fuel tax on diesel and rebate on gasoline, an investment of 116.9 million annually. Plus the tax rebate on intensive livestock and horticultural facilities, an investment of \$2 million annually. Saskatchewan agricultural and food program, an investment of 50 million annually.

In addition, the cost of NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) funding, an investment of 40 million annually. Not to mention crop insurance, an investment of 75 million annually; or grants to the industry, an investment of 8.5 million annually. And agricultural research, an investment of 9.1 annually.

(1500)

Saskatchewan has also provided significant funding to encourage diversification and innovation in the Saskatchewan agriculture and food sector through the \$90 million Agri-Food Innovation Fund.

The direction laid out in yesterday's throne speech helps to bring hope and optimism to these same farm families. The people of the entire province continue to benefit from the cautious and sensible approach of the management of our province's affairs by this government.

I am particularly pleased with the emphasis given to value-added and job-creating enterprises in the speech. Saskatchewan relies heavily on agriculture with no area more reliant on farm production than Redberry Lake. But we are moving, as the throne speech indicates, into a more diverse economy, much of it related to agriculture — such things as game farming, hunt farm, outfitting, and related processing and manufacturing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — I see by the local paper that the Yellowhead Highway Association is one of the finalists in the 1998 Tourism award of excellence. This group is an example of just what volunteers can accomplish. This very ambitious group has had major success in advancing the upgrading of the Yellowhead Route.

Just over one year ago I joined with the federal Minister of Transport and the provincial Highways minister when we opened the entire twin section of the Yellowhead highway from North Battleford to Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — This divided highway now completely spans my constituency of Redberry Lake. I certainly would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Yellowhead Highway Association.

On February 19 of this year, our Premier spoke at the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation annual convention. He spoke about the federal gun control law. He stated, and I quote:

As you know, Alberta's challenge to the law, a challenge we fully supported and endorsed, was defeated in a three to two decision in the Alberta Court of Appeal. Well it's not over yet. We are again joining with other jurisdictions in a renewed challenge to this unnecessary, costly legislation as we appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. We will argue on constitutional grounds that the gun law intrudes on an area of provincial authority, mainly provincial jurisdiction over property and civil rights.

Like many of you here today, this government believes in the responsible use and storage of firearms, but we do not believe that a cumbersome system of registration will curb crime. We believe that the hundreds of millions of dollars on this program would go further if it were spent on police officers and crime prevention rather than on giving law-abiding citizens new forms to fill out and buying new filing cabinets in which to store them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — I want to say a few word about health care, Mr. Speaker. Medicare is Saskatchewan's gift to Canada. It began here and it is being saved here — two facts; two uncontested facts.

I am being very proper today and reserved here, sir, Mr. Speaker. So all I want to say at this time is that anyone or any political party which tries to say that health care in Saskatchewan is in disrepair has their facts twisted.

I don't want to suggest that someone might be spreading misinformation on narrow partisan reasons, because that would be impolite of me. But I do have to admit, Mr. Speaker, that I get a bit annoyed when I hear people, who look suspiciously like the members opposite, say that our health care is in crisis.

As our Minister of Finance said not too long ago, Bosnia is in crisis; we are not. But our health system is changed, and it is working better than ever. I feel sorry for the opposition members who keep insisting the opposite.

How well is it working? Here are a few nice warm statistics to show us.

Each day in the province 15,000 people see a family doctor or a specialist and the health system serves 35,000 residents a day.

Each day 4,300 people receive emergency or scheduled care in hospitals; 200 people use emergency road ambulances and 6,200 receive home care services . . .

An Hon. Member: — Every day.

Mr. Jess: — Yes, every day. Ninety-two hundred individuals are cared for in special care homes. Countless people each year receive immunization screening, prevention services, mental health and addiction counselling, rehabilitation therapy and assistance.

How else can we tell how we're doing?

Well cataract surgeries have increased threefold since 1987-88 to 11,237 procedures in '97-98; 240 more surgeries are performed in Saskatchewan every day. CAT scan examinations increased by over 31 per cent over four years to a total of 41,830 in 1996-97. That number is expected to be at 47,000 this year. Hip and knee replacements have almost doubled in the same time frame.

Here's a very good story, Mr. Speaker. On the news just a few days ago — you may have seen it — waiting lists for emergency heart patients in Regina have been totally eliminated.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Totally. With a new cardiac treatment facility in Regina General Hospital, immediate emergency service is available.

Mr. Speaker, all this is good news, not bad news. Not to mention the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have done nearly all of this by ourselves. While we were modernizing the delivery system, while we were providing the largest health budget in the history of Saskatchewan at \$1.7 billion, while we were adding an extra 9 million to hire 200 extra badly needed nurses, while we were doing all of this, the federal government was clearing its throat and thinking about putting some of the money it took out of health care back into the system.

It's a little late. It's less than they took out, but we appreciate it. And the important thing is for Saskatchewan, that new again money is not replacement money. We had already replaced every cent that they took out. It is additional money for increased cancer services, for shorter waiting lists, and for women's health services.

There is more, much more, but I want to mention just one more fact. More doctors trained in Saskatchewan are staying in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — The rural practice establishment grant program is helping some of those doctors establish themselves in rural areas such as mine. That is more good news.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, speaking of rural health and speaking of rumours of a decline in rural health care, let me repeat something I said earlier. Let me repeat what the Premier has

said and what both ministers of Health have said. I say this for the people, the community of Hafford, and for all rural communities — we are committed to improving health services in both rural and urban Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jess: — Our health districts are working with the people in their communities to determine what type of health services they need in their local facilities. Many communities like mine have converted their small hospitals to health centres which provide a broader range of services and are more responsive to local needs. Let me repeat that, Mr. Speaker — a broader range of services, not a lesser.

These health centres will provide emergency services, observation and convalescent services, diagnostic testing in health assessment, outpatients, physicians, and nursing services.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, the Tory candidate in my riding came through telling everyone that the Hafford hospital was being closed. The people in my constituency can read and they could see for themselves what is going on. They were not pleased with the little Tory who cried wolf, and they told him so.

They also told him they didn't think much of his leader's plan to freeze spending on health care and to bring in private payments for certain non-life-threatening health services. That kind of program doesn't fly with Saskatchewan people.

One more thing, Mr. Speaker. Health care is the single largest item in our budget because health care is the single most important service that we can provide. We do not take that responsibility lightly and we did not make the decision to alter the system on a whim. As Robert Kennedy said, one-fifth of the people are against everything all the time. I wonder why that quote causes the members opposite to come to mind.

(1515)

As many of you know, a few years ago I was privileged to visit Great Britain for meetings sponsored by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I spent some of my time looking at the Parliament Building in London, the Mother of Parliaments as it is known.

I won't try to tell you how I felt wandering through that majestic building. A Saskatchewan farmer, a rural MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from a legislature not yet a century old, present at the sight where parliamentary democracy began nearly 1,000 years ago.

I was aware of my relative smallness in the grand scheme of things. One legislator among thousands who have followed those who first wrote the Magna Carta and those who first stood and spoke in this the very first parliament.

At the same time I thought about what I do, what we all do here in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. It is equally significant, equally historical, with our legislative ancestors. We operate in a different time, on perhaps a different historical scale, but we too are parliamentarians in the grand tradition. I was proud, but I was also humble. Touching the stones of that

great building, where in one sense our history begins, crystallized those feelings for me.

I mention my trip for one good reason. The members before me who have moved acceptance of His Honour's Speech from the Throne have each referred to our place in the tradition of parliamentary democracy. Those were fine words — true words. We need to be constantly reminded that we represent not only the present, but also those who went before and those who follow.

Once more I wish to quote the great parliamentarian Edmund Burke, who said, society is an intergenerational bargain between the dead, the living, and those yet to be born. Seeing the original parliament confirmed for me the truth of those statements. We walk in the footsteps of parliamentarians past, as we blaze new trails into the future to be followed by generations of parliamentarians yet unborn.

Moving the throne speech is a great responsibility. Praising it and the government which created it is easy. As His Honour said, his speech charts a balanced and visionary course which will continue us on our journey into the new century. Because of the common sense, faith, hard work, and co-operation of the people of Saskatchewan, we have come a long way in a short time. The Saskatchewan way, the balanced approach, has taken us out of darkness toward the light.

We have much of which we can be proud; we still have much to do, for us, for our pioneers, and for our children.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that while I am proud to move the acceptance of the Speech from the Throne, proud because the throne speech is another piece of progressive and responsible record of our government. A record that will stand the test of time, a record that will prove that we have been successful in reclaiming Saskatchewan for Saskatchewan people under the able leadership of our Premier. A Premier who has shown himself to be the great leader that this province needed for the '90s and on into the next millennium.

Each time that we're faced with a difficult situation our Premier and our caucus find ways to deal with the matter in a responsible, compassionate manner, always with the people of Saskatchewan in mind.

We made some hard choices but they were the right choices. Right for the budget, right for the system, and right for the people.

Mr. Speaker, members of the legislature, citizens of this great province, I want to state emphatically to you that this throne speech is also a guide to the right choices for Saskatchewan people, right for the budget, right for the system — yes, right for the people.

Mr. Speaker, as a rural member of the government, a government who truly believes in humanity first, I am proud to move, seconded by the hon. member from the Battleford-Cut Knife:

That an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable John E.N. Wiebe, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Saskatchewan.

May it please Your Honour:

We, Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Saskatchewan in session assembled, humbly thank you Your Honour for the gracious speech which Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Now why is the hon. member for Athabasca on his feet?

Mr. Belanger: — Yes, to ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you it gives me great pleasure to introduce a number of guests that are here today. Maybe just quickly I would ask them to quickly stand and introduce them. All the way from Ile-a-la-Crosse, which is a seven and a half hour drive from here if you drive like me, but more of an eight-hour drive if you drive like a normal person.

But up on the far right up there is Bob Desjarlais and Bob works with the local housing authority. Next to Bob we have Lawrence Corrigan. Lawrence is the housing manager in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Next to Lawrence we have Verna Daigneault, and Verna is on the housing authority board. And next to Verna is Cecile Favel, and Cecile is also on the housing authority board in Ile-a-la-Crosse. And next to Cecile is her son Dennis Favel. And actually, Mr. Speaker, it's her husband but he looks so young next to her I just thought I'd call him her son.

So it would please me, Mr. Speaker, if I'd ask the Assembly, my colleagues here to welcome these fine people from my hometown of Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADDRESS IN REPLY (continued)

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be asked to second His Honour's fine speech and it is an honour to be chosen by the Premier to do so. It is both a humbling and invigorating experience. I'm especially pleased to second the excellent speech by my colleague and neighbour, the member from Redberry Lake.

Having once delivered the address to the throne speech myself in 1996, Mr. Speaker, I fully understand the pressure of the situation. The depth of talent and eloquence in this caucus

amazes me anew each session. Of course such an excellent speech and a most excellent government record make it easy to praise both.

And, Mr. Speaker, I wish to welcome you back to the Chair and commend you on your past handling of this House. It must be difficult at times to maintain order and decorum, but you have done so in a fair and just manner. I know that under your guidance this session will continue in the same way, and I would also commend you on the education process you started and have continued with education with school children.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of our former colleagues, Bob Mitchell and Ed Tchorzewski, for their contribution to our province and our government. Their footprints have gone in many directions, leaving a clear and future path for others to follow.

The throne speech is one of common sense, one of balance, and one of spring. And these are all vital necessities to regenerate hope in my constituency.

1998 was a year that many in the Battleford-Cut Knife constituency would like to forget. We experienced extreme drought on the west side of the boundary. Because of a grain shortage, low grain prices, low oil prices, and high input costs, many in the Midwest struggled to preserve their livelihood.

Saskatchewan farmers are some of the most productive and internationally competitive producers in the world. However, they cannot compete against the federal treasuries of the United States and the European Union. We need to protect the future of Canadian agriculture. Saskatchewan relies heavily on agriculture and we as a province cannot protect it alone.

Mr. Hermanson is quick to pin the fault on this government. He never tires of saying that this NDP government has failed to meet the changes of a global market; that we discourage new businesses because of high taxes; that we in effect do not support our rural communities in any way, shape, or form.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, this is the same Mr. Hermanson who in 1996, as a Reform MP (Member of Parliament), tried to convince the House of Commons to reduce \$20 million from Agriculture Canada's 1996-97 budget.

Our Premier and our Agriculture minister have continued to pressure Ottawa to address the pressing issue of the cash flow problem. A short-term solution has been recognized. Now we need to address a long-term strategy.

Our provincial government has shown our commitment to agriculture and we will continue to show our commitment to agriculture.

For example, the PST exemption on farm machinery and repairs, fertilizer, pesticides and seed, \$127.4 million annually; exemptions from the fuel tax on diesel and rebate on gasoline, 116.9 million annually; tax rebate on intensive livestock and horticultural facilities, Sask Ag and Food programs, an investment of 40 million; not to mention crop insurance, an investment of 75 million annually; and agriculture research, 9.1 annually.

And our Crowns are assisting. Farmers pay less than 80 per cent of what it costs SaskPower to provide them with electricity, subsidized through higher rates charged to major commercial customers. Our SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) Crown has allowed people to choose through three- to eleven-month terms for their insurance, cutting costs of seasonal vehicles like farm trucks. Saskatchewan Agri-Food Innovation Fund provides 90 million into this sector to encourage diversification and innovation for agriculture and food.

The member from Redberry has mentioned the farm situation, but in Battleford-Cut Knife constituency this is a rural crisis, affecting implement dealers, retail stores, bulk dealers, and school enrolments. We are and have been experiencing elevator and school closures.

And yet, Mr. Speaker, we are addressing these challenges and changes to our demographics. Local farmers have diversified from traditional livestock to elk, bison, deer, and other exotic species. Others have diversified from traditional crops to peas, canary seed, dill, and echinacea.

Randy Sander has ventured into processing echinacea, and the Skinners from Wilkie are processing elk horns. Value-added processing, local and innovative.

The tradition of co-operation is still at work today. As a solution to the situation in which farmers find themselves, they are forming co-ops to build terminals, pellet plants, hog barns, and feedlots. All these initiatives are positive reactions to global changes.

(1530)

Other businesses include the Maverick Tannery, Sifto salt, and KD Welding in Unity, Reid Welding in Cut Knife. By the way, both welding companies have moved here from Alberta because the prospects were better.

There's Sally's Restaurant and Wilkie Motel — also residents of Alberta moving to Saskatchewan. G L M Tanks in Battleford and CCS and Senlac Thermal. Each and every business is contributing to employment and increasing opportunities.

My area will also benefit from the Alliance Pipeline crossing our fair province, generating jobs for many who have been laid off from the oil patch.

There are ads in the local papers for employment at the Macklin and Atton's Lake Regional Parks, and those are resources we often neglect to mention.

My area encompasses Macklin, Evesham, Senlac, Unity, Wilkie, Landis, Battleford, Delmas, Cut Knife, Neilburg, Marsden. And within this constituency there are five regional parks, Manitou, Suffern, Macklin, Atton's, and Wilkie, allowing Alberta and Saskatchewan residents the luxury of the great outdoors. A place to go, to rest, and to revitalize.

My area is also embedded in history— the Poundmaker Interpretative Centre, Government Ridge with the Government House, the Dominion Land Titles Building, early century

homes, the rock of Cloan which served as a landmark for early settlers. The tourism potential abounds with opportunity.

I also represent five Indian reserves: Red Pheasant, Mosquitoe, Sweetgrass, Little Pine, and Poundmaker, who are working together under the umbrella of the Battlefords Tribal Council — working together, Mr. Speaker, to deliver health programs, social programs, and education programs to their people and creating employment and opportunities for their people.

Battlefords-Cut Knife constituents are resilient. We are tenacious. We persevere and we do the things the Saskatchewan way. Our government has been proactive in this development, working with and encouraging local businesses, councils, and communities in their pursuit of progress.

This is not all, Mr. Speaker. This government supports the women's agriculture network, PAMI (Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute) research, the beef industry, the pork industry, specialized livestock, food processing, specialty crops, Ag-West biotech, infra ready products, the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) research in the geographical sciences — the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

Even before the two-year \$140 million contribution to AIDA (Agriculture Insurance Disaster Assistance program), this province devotes more of its tax base to sustaining rural areas than any other provincial government or the federal government. In fact, Saskatchewan provides 4.09 times as much as the federal government, and 4.66 times the average of all provinces.

This support is given because we believe in our rural communities. We believe that their survival and their strength is essential to us all. We agreed to participate in AIDA because we believe in supporting and fighting for rural Saskatchewan. Rural communities have been an essential part of our past history; they are vital to our present; they will be integral to our future.

And we will not turn our backs on those who have helped this province grow and survive. As the speech to the throne indicated, we will continue to strive for balance; we will continue to have faith in one another and in our ideas; and we will continue to support one another as we have in the past — as we will in the future.

As I stand here before you, Mr. Speaker, I'm also reminded of this building's heritage, and yet this building's heritage is the heritage of Saskatchewan people. Its past history is our past history.

And another piece of history has just been added. The throne speech illustrated many positive points and admitted new challenges await us in our present year and into the future of the new millennium.

T.S. Eliot once wrote:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

Someone recently wrote to the *Star-Phoenix* and suggested it

was time for the Liberals and NDP to stop blaming the former Tory government for all their problems. The writer suggested we leave the grudge behind and forget the past. In other words, we should forget the debt. We are not carrying a grudge but we are carrying a cumbersome debt.

Besides how can we forget it when they, the old Tories in their most recent incarnation, frequently rant that we are driving people out of the province with high taxes. If we didn't have to pay our interest — yes, our interest, because we at least are not afraid of our responsibility — if we didn't have to pay our \$750 million in interest on the debt yearly, we could provide tax relief. That's \$750 per person, or \$3,000 for a family of four right off the top of everything we collect in taxes. That's \$750 million just to pay the interest on our debt.

Yet despite this dilemma from our past, we have delivered lower taxes in every budget since we balanced the budget in 1994-95. We have reduced personal income tax. We have reduced sales tax, and as our Minister of Finance says, we will not jeopardize our progress by introducing measures guaranteed to lead the province back to the days of deficit and debt.

But we will continue to reduce taxes in a responsible, sustainable way, when and as we can afford to do so, and without risking our balanced budget, important services, or our children's and grandchildren's future. We will do it this way because we recognize that the future does indeed contain the past. We will do it this way because it is the common sense Saskatchewan way. And we will not forget any part of our heritage, the good or the not so good, because that too would be a betrayal of our mutual futures.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to spend the next few minutes speaking about something essential to our present and our future — our health care system.

There is no doubt that health care has undergone many changes in recent years. Because of limited resources, we strove to ensure that our tax dollars were spent as effectively as possible. It makes more sense to use funds to increase the number of services, or improve the services, such as the primary health services initiatives.

The wellness and community-based health care system improves health care for the people of Saskatchewan. His government, the Lieutenant Governor, spoke of our goal to keep building an education system that keeps our children and our youth . . . that gives our children and our youth the tools they'll need to earning a living.

Working with our partners in education — our teachers, our parents, our school divisions — together we have made a commitment to the equality of education that will enable us to move forward on key initiatives facing our school system.

In fact, certain key initiatives for students are already underway. These include auto mechanics, autobody, cosmetology, commercial cooking, computer technology — such skills that introduce students into trades that will benefit both the students and our communities now and into the future.

And as the winter fades away and the awakening of spring is

near, I sense renewed optimism in our province and in our constituency. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the people of Battleford-Cut Knife for their strength, their courage, and their support, and I am proud and honoured to represent them.

Yes, spring is a time of hope — for rain, for bountiful beginnings, for jobs, for security, for quality of life. And we as a government are committed to maintaining hope.

Mr. Speaker, because the Speech from the Throne speaks positively of how far we have come and confidently of where we are going, I too have confidence — in the people of Saskatchewan and in our government.

I am honoured to second the motion in support of this Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the House to reply to the throne speech on behalf of the official opposition. I would like to welcome back all of the members and state that my colleagues and I look forward to the spirited debate that lies ahead.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new pages for this session: Melanie Bratkoski, Darcy Criddle, Dean Mulhall, Kris Parker, and Sheena Simonson. I have no doubt that your time in the legislature will prove to be both educational and meaningful in all of your future endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend a special greeting to everyone in the province, particularly those in Canora-Pelly constituency. I am sure that they will all be eagerly watching the democratic process and all of the proceedings in the House over the next few months.

I'm pleased to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that both the communities of Canora and Foam Lake now enjoy cable television and have the legislature channel to all of those people. And I know that there will be many who will taking advantage of that.

Mr. Speaker, since the House last sat, many things have changed for the better for the Saskatchewan Party. Our membership base has grown and the people of Saskatchewan are embracing the fundamentals that we have outlined in our party's platform.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition has laid out a clear plan for the future of this province — something the people of Saskatchewan can believe in. The throne speech contained nothing but false claims for this government, Mr. Speaker.

They have not built a strong, sustainable health care system. They have not created a conducive learning environment in education. They have not maintained an adequate level of job growth in Saskatchewan, and has fallen drastically behind in agriculture, and our highways continue to fall apart.

The fact that this government has the audacity to claim that they have done well is a serious insult to the intelligence of the people of Saskatchewan.

Our province is in a serious crisis, Mr. Speaker, on all fronts. Saskatchewan residents have not heard any solutions from this government and are not likely to, because it has become apparent that they have run out of ideas. This government's idea of solving the health care crisis is to throw more and more money at it and see what happens. Meanwhile, they sit on their hands as the farmers in Saskatchewan are in dire straits.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot fathom how this government runs our province, but it is definitely time for a change. And, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that the official opposition will be introducing approximately 30 private members' Bills this session that will help bring about this change.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the residents of the Canora-Pelly constituency have expressed many opinions and have some tremendous ideas on what can be done in a variety of things. We've had people that have come into our office, that have phoned me directly with ideas on highways and roads and what should be done to alleviate the kinds of conditions that are being faced by the rural municipalities.

We have concerns about the infrastructure in Saskatchewan, in rural Saskatchewan especially, when we look at the tremendous downloading that has taken place over the last seven, eight years by this government on both rural and urban municipalities.

Many residents have looked at the whole constituency and have looked at transportation and have looked at the need to maintain railways and rail lines and to look forward to a continued good transportation system for all residents of Saskatchewan and especially Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of health care, that is probably the area that I have received the most concerns, the most letters, the most phone calls, people wanting to express a concern about health care.

And we've heard a lot about health care reform over the years. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to spend a little bit of time talking very specifically about some concerns that have been expressed by people in the Canora-Pelly constituency.

In 1991 during the election campaign, the NDP government said nothing of health reform. They said nothing of hospital closures. They talked absolutely nothing about acute care bed eliminations. And very quickly we heard that 52 — 52 rural hospitals were going to close and in fact become something else. They were no longer going to offer acute care beds.

(1545)

Well, Mr. Speaker, that caused tremendous anxiety for people back in those early years of the '90s because people knew that the services that they were accustomed to, very close to them, and in three very specific communities, Mr. Speaker, in the Canora Pelly constituency — Invermay, Norquay and Theodore — all three had their hospitals closed.

And as a result some very simple things, you know, simple things that might occur in a community during a hockey game, where someone has the need to go for stitches, now that no

longer was something that could be done in a matter of minutes; it now had to require a travelling distance of 35 or 40 miles to secure that kind of service.

But people looked at the possibility of expanded health care in what was referred to as the regional model. People looked at the hospitals in Preeceville, in Canora, and Foam Lake and said that there would be an expansion of services in those areas. And if not in those particular facilities, Mr. Speaker, then at least in Yorkton they could expect to receive the kind of care that they require.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that isn't the case. What we see happening now is not only the fact that those three communities no longer have acute care beds and no longer have hospitals, but we see further reductions. In those communities there used to be a situation where at least a doctor provided five days service to the community, or four. But now we're seeing that reduced to two. We're seeing the situation occur in Theodore, where now blood and x-ray services have been curtailed drastically, and now the people have to travel to Yorkton.

What monies have been saved, Mr. Speaker? Well we know — minister has indicated very clearly — that we spend \$1.8 billion on health care. But now the additional costs have to be borne by the residents of Saskatchewan because they now have to travel; they now have to incur the costs of travelling to get services that were provided.

When we start to look at the facilities that are still in . . . the hospitals that are still in the Canora-Pelly constituency, we have to look at the communities of Foam Lake, Preeceville, and Canora. Those are the three hospitals that remain in the Canora-Pelly constituency — not a lot of hospital services or acute care services. We know that the constituencies were set up on a basis of about 17,000 population, inclusive of children and non-voting people — 17,000 people to be served by approximately 25 or 28 acute care beds in three very, very distant locations.

That's not the kind of service that the people of Saskatchewan wanted. Now we hear the minister state very clearly . . . it was the associate minister who said some rural hospitals will close. Well the first question that people phoned . . . when they phoned me, the first question they asked was, is it going to be my hospital? There's only three, so that didn't take long to actually start to look at who would be affected.

The statistics from Sask Health indicate that . . . the numbers from '96-97 indicate that two of those three have a bed utilization daily census of less than 10 beds. That was the criteria that was used in the early '90s for the closure of the 52 hospitals.

So what we've taken a look at is not whether these hospitals will close — because I sincerely hope that they're not closing — but what we want to have is a commitment from this government, from the Minister of Health, from the Minister of Finance, that indeed they are not going to alter the funding for acute care beds.

We have some comments from people that have indicated, you know, the situation in Preeceville. Preeceville is a growing

community. It's a lovely community. It has a hospital of under-10-bed utilization but it serves a tremendously large area. The people in communities, in the small communities of Ketchen or Rockford or Endeavour or Sturgis all rely on the acute care facility in Preeceville for their immediate needs.

Yes, of course they know that the more complicated acute care need is going to be addressed in Yorkton, or for that matter in Saskatoon and Regina. But they rely on the facility in Preeceville.

The CEO, the chief executive officer of the Assiniboine Valley Health District has stated very clearly that the plan of the district board is to maintain Preeceville as an acute care facility. And I think the residents of the area are indeed comforted by that. But there's always the question about whether or not the district health board will receive the required funding to maintain that acute care level in Preeceville. Because the fear of course is, that on some magic date, the announcement will be that no acute care bed . . . funding will be provided for a district board where a facilities under a specific number exist.

And that's the fear, that's the fear that the people have, Mr. Speaker. And the government accuses the opposition, the Saskatchewan Party, of fearmongering. Hardly, Mr. Speaker, hardly. The minister is the one that has stated that there will be fewer rural hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, last week I met with one of the councillors in the community of Foam Lake and I asked the gentleman whether or not the town council was concerned about Foam Lake. And the immediate reaction was, of course we are. Foam Lake has four acute care beds — four, Mr. Speaker. They serve a large area and they also want to have a guarantee. They want to have a guarantee from this government that suddenly the rug won't be pulled out from under them.

And as a result they have asked, the town council of Foam Lake has asked for the East Central District Health Board, its representative of course at the local area, the CEO, to come to a public meeting. They have organized a public meeting to ask the East Central District Health Board to come forward and put its plan before the residents of Foam Lake and area.

I think that that shows leadership. That shows leadership on behalf of that council to say we want to ensure the residents of the town of Foam Lake and the surrounding area that indeed we will have acute care coverage, and they're going to go forward with that public meeting.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of letters that have been sent by various people to raise their concerns about acute care, and I just want to read a paragraph from one of the letters that was sent to the minister . . . actually it's to the chief executive officer of the East Central District Health Board.

Foam Lake has undergone tremendous transition. There have been closures of 11 long-term care beds and they were moved from the Jubilee Nursing Home over to what was still called the hospital because it has four acute care beds. And this is a couple of sentences that are contained in this letter. It says:

It's very unfortunate that the seniors of this area have

become victims of such bureaucratic, thoughtless decisions. What a shame. These are the same seniors who donated their time and money towards furnishings, equipment, etc. because they knew one day they would require the facility and its services. They were helping to build the security for their geriatric years.

Incidentally, where do the residents of Foam Lake and area go when they become ill, are in need of a hospital bed, and the four designated beds are already filled?

So you see, Mr. Speaker, that's a concern that people are expressing. They know that seniors have looked . . . they know that they will have to have need of acute care. That's a statistic that everyone in Canada is familiar with, but they also want to have some guarantee from this government that indeed those facilities will be available and that indeed care can be provided.

One of the other things that we have to look at, Mr. Speaker, is an issue that has, as indicated today in a lot of comments made by both opposition and government members, is that Saskatchewan is facing a nursing shortage. No question. We know that. It has been there for a long period of time.

I want to quote from the *Canora Courier*, Mr. Speaker, of Wednesday, February 24. This is an article right on the front page and it says, "Nursing shortage said on verge of critical."

The CEO in Assiniboia Valley District Health Board is a gentleman by the name of Gary Johnson, and these are the comments made by this member . . . or this person. He says, "The situation is very close to being critical. It has become a very serious concern that began about 18 months ago."

Eighteen months ago is when Mr. Johnson indicates that they already knew and had a nursing shortage. He goes on in the article to say this, "We're using everyone we have on a regular basis . . ." explaining that if there are no disruptions or situations with a sudden need, the district will be okay. But if it ever needs extra staff, it will be difficult. That's the message from the CEO of the Assiniboine Valley District Health Board.

Now as we indicated today, we see examples right across this country where Ontario is looking for 10,000 nurses. They have already put in place the funding. Alberta is doing the same thing.

What we're seeing happen in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, is that the cities, the urban centres — Saskatoon, Regina — are facing a critical nursing shortage. They are looking at drawing people, so not only will we lose nurses from this province to other provinces who have possibly a better tax system, but we will then start to see the movement of nurses from rural Saskatchewan to urban Saskatchewan. That is what I think Mr. Johnson is referring to when he said it will be a difficult time.

If nurses are attracted to Yorkton, Swift Current, to Regina, and they leave the areas around Foam Lake or Preeceville or Canora, there will be a nursing shortage, no question.

Now, if there is a nursing shortage, what does the board do with their hospital beds? I think that is what is the most common fear

amongst people in my constituency. That concern about the fact that an acute care bed will not be available for me if I become seriously ill. Those are the concerns that are being expressed.

And I think the Minister of Health and the associate minister must pay very special attention to this because health care is a concern for everyone. I would dare say that any member of the opposition or any member of the government would be very, very concerned if they had a problem that actually involved themselves.

The example given to me last week, Mr. Speaker, and one that I think showed just how traumatic it is for families is a certain individual from my constituency has been battling cancer for a number of years and it has been in remission. But about three weeks ago, blood work at the Preeceville hospital determined that the doctor didn't like what he saw in the tests. So he sent the individual back to Regina to see a specialist at the cancer clinic and to indeed go forward with whatever that doctor recommended.

The problem that night when I received the phone call from the individual's daughter was that it would be four to six weeks before a CAT scan would be done on this individual. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the trauma felt by the family when they know that the person has been battling cancer for a number of years and now they find out that they cannot really proceed with anything for four to six weeks? Tremendous anxiety and tremendous pressure.

And those are the kinds of things that this government has instituted in this province. Long waiting lists — no one has the ability to be dealt with on a very good basis at all.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other concerns in my constituency of course is agriculture — agriculture plays a very, very important role in my constituency. And I first want to begin by expressing my appreciation to all of those men and women in the constituency, in the Canora-Pelly constituency specifically, who have taken the initiative, who have taken the initiative to organize rallies, who have taken the initiative to form a railway abandonment committee to look at the possible closure and abandonment of railways; to the individuals in the committee of Stenen who are trying to purchase the elevator, the elevator that has already been abandoned by Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and are now trying to purchase it as a community elevator for seed cleaning. These are initiatives.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, when I spoke to the mayor of the community of Stenen he showed me a letter that the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool had written to him outlining what they saw as the basis for a deal. And you know, Mr. Speaker, it was laughable because the conditions that were put to this group of individuals really were conditions that could never be met. They were forcing the hand of the local people to say well, you're just going to have to give up because you're not going to be able to meet the conditions to be able to purchase that elevator.

And in the end the final statement was that if you are successful in meeting all the conditions and you purchase the elevator, you're going to have to move it off the sight anyway because we won't let you keep it on the property. Now laughable,

laughable, Mr. Speaker, because here is a small community trying to save an elevator, not to be in competition with the grain companies but to try to save something for rural Saskatchewan, for their communities, so they could have a seed cleaning plant. And there's just no one working towards that.

The group that's looking at the abandonment of the railway line . . . and there have been a number of meetings and I want to congratulate those individuals in that area, in that north-east corner of the province. They've been meeting with Manitoba people as well, Manitoba farmers, because there's a tremendous concern on the other side of the border as well when we start to look at traffic that goes through Arran and Pelly and Norquay and Hvas and Stenen, all the way up to Preeceville. That's a line that's the Canadian National Railways is looking at as an abandoned line of the future.

(1600)

There has to be a better way, Mr. Speaker. We cannot just allow lines to be abandoned and ripped up and then in the end when farmers finally realize that there is . . . there could have been an alternative and they maybe would have been able to put together something that that system is no longer there. It's the same situation whether we looked at a grain elevator or whether we looked at a railway line. We cannot have one get knocked down or one ripped up because then the remaining one that's still left becomes useless.

One thing became very clear, Mr. Speaker. Last fall a number of farmers in the Rama-Buchanan-Canora area wanted to bring the whole agriculture crisis to the forefront to make sure that urban people understood the kind of dilemma that farmers were facing, and they organized a rally in the community of Canora, just outside of Canora, back on December 17, 1998. It was a blinding snowstorm . . . there was a blinding snowstorm that day, Mr. Speaker, but still well over a hundred people turned out.

And I know that the Minister of Agriculture of the current government was there, and I think the message that he heard very, very clearly from the people who attended that rally was that there needs to be leadership, there needs to be leadership by government and they felt that this government was not providing them that leadership.

Yes, there is agreement. But of course Saskatchewan cannot fight the European subsidies and the North American subsidies alone as a province. But grain production is so vital through the province of Saskatchewan as part of Canada that we must lead that charge. We must show the rest of Canadians that indeed Saskatchewan stands behind its farmers. And that kind of lobbying, that kind of effort was expressed by farmers. Every person that spoke at that rally wanted to inform the government that they need to get to Ottawa, that they need to bring forward a plan.

The concern in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, it's not just for the farmers. I think that's been overplayed. How many people have expressed the fact that urban communities will be affected as well?

I attended an urban/rural forum in the community of Stenen

where we heard representatives from Saskatoon come and indicate how agriculture has affected businesses in Saskatoon. That's right, Mr. Speaker, how businesses in Saskatoon were affected by the agriculture crisis. We can see that already. We can see Flexi-Coil layoffs in Saskatoon, we can see production cutbacks in Morris farm equipment in Yorkton. These are concerns.

This is why the agriculture sector is looking at it saying this is not to just provide dollars for farmers. This is to pay bills for the fuel dealers, for the chemical dealers, for the fertilizer dealers. It's to be able to pay down mortgage. All of these concerns have come about.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the startling things that was shown so very, very evidently at Canora at that rally. I had a gentleman show me a grain ticket, a grain ticket from the mid-1950s, okay, so that's 40-plus years ago. That grain ticket showed that the price received for a bushel of barley was \$1.46.

Now if \$1.46 was the correct price to receive in the 1950s when — as I understand it, before my time — a stamp was 3 cents; a gallon I might add, not a litre, a gallon of diesel ranged in area from 19 to 21 cents; taxes on a quarter of land were 75 to \$80 on a pretty good quarter of land. Those kinds of costs, Mr. Speaker, today are seven, eight, nine times that amount. What we looked at then is, if a \$1.45 was correct in the 1950s, why is \$1.50 the price today?

You know I heard the member for Redberry Lake talk about the cheap food policy in Canada. And that's the situation that we're looking at when we start to look at barley and malt barley, we start to look at wheat and the production of flour. The prices haven't changed from the '50s and we're now moving into a new millennium with new costs and they haven't changed. It's a wonder that farmers continue to exist.

Yes, as indicated, farmers are very industrious. They have diversified, they're growing different crops, and they're trying to cover themselves. But in . . . when crop rotation dictates that you have wheat and barley as your only crops in 1998, guess what, yields are down. We had a frost in early June, wheat midge has affected the wheat production, and as a result farmers have come into my office indicating, well you know, I have a 30 bushel an acre barley crop.

Well urban Saskatchewan might think 30 bushels per acre, that's a lot of barley. Reality is, if they're going to sell that barley for a dollar and a half per bushel, that's \$45 per acre. The input costs are in the area of 75, 80, \$85 an acre. They're losing, they're losing on every acre of land that they've seeded, Mr. Speaker. And those are the concerns that have to be dealt with.

This government has not shown leadership. This government has not been behind the farmer when they should have been, and people in Canora-Pelly are indeed very, very upset with that.

One of the other concerns, Mr. Speaker, that I want to mention today is in reaction to some of the comments in the throne speech regarding education and where we're moving as far as the K to 12 scene, and its commitment, this government's commitment to education.

Took a look at the kind of costs that school boards in the province have been looking at since . . . all through the '90s, Mr. Speaker. And I want to inform the House that in 1991-92 — and these statistics are directly from the *Public Accounts and Estimates* — in 1991-92 the total amount of money for operating grant for the educational development fund that existed at that time and capital grants was \$452 million approximately; 452 million in '91-92.

In 1997-98 — of course these are the last remaining numbers as far as audited numbers — the same categories, the number is 397 million. A full \$55 million less, Mr. Speaker, less than what was given to boards of education in '91-92.

I then took a look at the brief that was presented to the cabinet, presented by the associations, the partners in education: the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association); the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation); LEADS (League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents); and SASBO (Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials); and the documents at the back of this presentation included operating costs, total operating costs.

Now I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that in 1990-91 total costs excluding debt and capital — this number does not include debt and capital — the total costs of education were \$821 million; 821. In 1997-98 — 925 million.

So now you see what's happened with education. We have an increase of over \$105 million in the cost of education. Everything from salaries, cost of living, increases in providing technology, being able to have computers installed, has necessitated a rise of a hundred-and-some million dollars by boards of education. On the other side, the government's commitment to K to 12 education has been a reduction.

And I added up all the numbers that have happened, all of the grant amounts that have been allocated since '91-92, and comparing them to that year, the total sum, cumulative total, has been 357 million less over those periods of time.

So when you start to look at the throne speech saying, well, we're committing to education and we're going to ensure that in education we're going to have the safe classrooms and the kinds of things — these are concerns of teachers and of trustees and of board members every year, Mr. Speaker.

Every year teachers and the principal and the boards of education look at plans for their school division and say, we want to be able to improve our curriculum, we want to ensure that there is a safe school for students to be educated in, and of course we want to move forward with new technologies.

So what has the government done? Well in the throne speech, the government has indicated that there will be a Role of Schools Task Force — A Role of Schools Task Force will be established to look at the future.

Well you know, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Role of Schools Task Force is something that occurs and should occur on an annual basis. I was pleased to see that the Minister of Education is announcing the Evergreen Curriculum today, which will allow us to have changes to curriculum on an annual basis,

because that's exactly what's needed. And maybe then we wouldn't be in the dilemma we are today with the math curriculum, and finding out that our math skills just aren't quite up to par.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, in 1992 the document that I received from the SSTA (Saskatchewan School Trustees Association) is called *The Role of Schools*. It's already produced, Mr. Speaker. All that needs to be done of course is that we have to re-examine it because very clearly, as was stated by people in the teaching profession, the president of the SSTA has indicated, schools are changing, no question. They offer a greater amount of services.

But one of the comments made by the president of the SSTA needs to be looked at, Mr. Speaker, and I quote from the trustees' bulletin of February 28, 1999. It says this:

We need to look at what's expected of schools; what they should and shouldn't be doing, says S.S.T.A. president Debbie Ward. We hope the role can be defined and funding can be provided to help with added responsibilities.

It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker:

Those added duties haven't always been followed up with additional money, Ward points out. The government requires us to do more, tells us what to do, but doesn't give us extra funding to do those things.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, in the area of education, there are still concerns out there. I want to inform you, Mr. Speaker, of a situation that has occurred in this province.

People in the community of Qu'Appelle know the importance of their school. They recognize it from what it does in the area of recreation, from what it means to the community as a community facility, and what of course it does in many other areas, in the Social Services and Justice areas.

That school, I understand, Mr. Speaker, has an enrolment of about 195 students. But you know, discussion is taking place at that school by the residents and the board of education about discontinuing grades 10, 11, and 12. A school of 195 students and discussion is taking place about discontinuing grades 10, 11, and 12.

People in that community have been extremely vocal, and I'm sure members, government members, especially the Minister of Education, has received a number of letters and phone calls. But one of the other concerns that I discovered the other day was, I was talking to a gentleman who works here in the city of Regina but lives in Qu'Appelle. He has indicated to me, Mr. Speaker, that if discontinuance of those three grades occurs, he will be, he and his family, will be moving from Qu'Appelle and moving to Regina. So another blow to rural Saskatchewan. And I'm sure you'd agree, Mr. Speaker, that a school with 195 students is not a small school.

Yes, when we start to look at another situation very near my constituency — and I was asked to attend a public meeting there — in the community of Ebenezer, currently a kindergarten

to grade 6 school with 29 students; 29 students from kindergarten to grade 6. Parents, the board, everyone is concerned about wanting to maintain that school but when the numbers become 29, it becomes very, very difficult, even though it's an extremely good school. A very pleasant school, physically the structure is excellent, but now you're dealing with the fact of depopulation and the situation.

(1615)

The people there want to keep that school open at least a couple more years but the enrolments projected mean that that community, in about three years I think, will be down to 20 students. So you see, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of concern about education, about the delivery of education, and maintaining quality education throughout the province.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we are moving into a new millennium. A new era is upon us, and we need to give the people of Saskatchewan new hope. This appalling state of affairs this government has put us in is completely unacceptable. The members opposite have lost sight of what their role as government is, Mr. Speaker, and that is detrimental to everyone in this province, particularly our youth, who are getting out and getting out fast.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that it is noteworthy to mention that statistics are continually showing the youth of our province leaving for more lucrative opportunities to the south, the east, and the west of Saskatchewan. They are not staying here because of this government's lack of commitment to tax relief and broader job opportunities. It is time to stop the brain drain, Mr. Speaker, and keep our most vital natural resource at home.

This dismal throne speech, Mr. Speaker, exposes a tired old government with no plan and no vision. The people of Saskatchewan deserve solutions from the government, not propaganda. There are too many examples in which the members opposite have had no idea on what is going on in their own departments. This is a blatant example of a lack of communication with the people of this province and what is really happening in Saskatchewan.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, this goes back to my earlier point of how out of touch this government really is. The official opposition has done their homework, Mr. Speaker. We know what the people of Saskatchewan want; we know what the people of Saskatchewan need; and we know that this government is not going to give it to them.

There is absolutely no excuse for this government's abhorrent display in the health care system, in job creation, in highways, in agriculture, and in taxes, Mr. Speaker. Instead of addressing the issues, the members opposite choose to ignore them and subsequently overstate their record.

Mr. Speaker, it is for these reasons that I cannot support the throne speech, and I move the following amendment. Moved by myself and seconded by the member for Kindersley:

That the following words be added to the end of the motion:

But regrets that the throne speech showed absolutely no vision for the future on the part of the government, and revealed a tired government bankrupt of new ideas or innovative solutions to the problems plaguing Saskatchewan including crushing tax burden, faltering health care system, and dangerous highway; and therefore urges the government to dissolve this legislature and call a provincial election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The debate on the amendment and the main motion will continue concurrently. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to enter this debate on behalf of my constituents and caucus. I recall that on the date I was first introduced to this House, I was introduced, of course, as the member for North Battleford. An hon. member shouted out that I was the temporary member only. Well I have thought on those sage remarks and I have come to realize that he was, of course, absolutely right. I am a temporary member, so are we all temporary members. As we approach an election, we are reminded that we are all here for a time, and must sooner or later relinquish our seats. All we can hope is that our time here, be it long or short, will redound to the credit of ourselves, our communities, and our province.

Whether this is my last session or not, I can only say that I found it an honour for having represented the people of North Battleford constituency. I have learned much from my time here, and I've enjoyed my associations with constituents, my colleagues — even though at times they seem to be always disappearing on me — and yes, my political foes.

As an opposition member I have been impressed with the fact that behind the scenes all members are able to co-operate and work together to advance programs for the general good. And I would like to make reference to some of those ministers who have assisted me in my work.

When I was elected I made it a priority to do something to resolve the situation of the dangerous entrance to the city of North Battleford. Specifically I asked that the intersection of Highways 40 and 16 be moved from its present confusing and dangerous position. I was very happy with the co-operation I received from the Department of Highways and the minister, and I understand that that project is to proceed this year. That is an important improvement.

Constituents came to me about the condition of the River Heights row houses in North Battleford. These units, these River Heights units, were owned by The Battlefords Health District and were being phased out. Nothing but the most basic and minimal of maintenance was being done. I thought that the solution was to transfer those units from the health district to the North Battleford Housing Authority. And I am pleased to report that with the co-operation of the minister in charge of Saskatchewan Housing, The Battlefords Health District, and the city of North Battleford, that the units have now been transferred and I understand that major renovations are to proceed this year. The residents of those row houses are indeed grateful for the co-operation of Sask Housing.

I have spoken on the Nevada ticket sales issue. The Battlefords Health Foundation alerted me to the fact that break-open ticket sales throughout the province are being used to finance hospitals in Regina and Saskatoon only. In view of the fact that 80 per cent of Nevada ticket sales are in the rural area, it struck me as unfair that the two cities received all of the revenue and the rest of the province receives nothing. I was extremely pleased when the Minister of Health announced that she is reviewing this policy with a view to a more equitable share of Nevada ticket revenues.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to have serious reservations about funding our health system out of the sale of break-open tickets. However, as long as we are doing this it is important that at least the share of those sales be distributed equitably and fairly around the province. And I want to thank the minister publicly for correcting this unfair situation.

I also want to publicly thank all ministers and officials who have been prepared to meet with me and hear me out and work jointly for the betterment of our constituents regardless of party label.

This is, as I say, an election year when we are all called to account before the voters who will have the ultimate say as to whether we have served them well or otherwise. To some of us the fact we will not be back may come as a surprise. I won't attempt to speculate as to who those might be. I will leave it to the voters to make that determination.

I would however like to pay tribute to those of our colleagues who have chosen not to return following this session. The member for Regina Qu'Appelle has been appreciated by all for her warmth and friendliness. The member for Regina Northeast will be bringing to a close a long and distinguished career.

The member for Saskatoon Greystone inspired a generation of voters in this province, especially women and — including my daughter — people who had become jaded and cynical with politics. The member for Saskatoon Greystone brought to this House and to the political process generally a sense of mission and inspiration which continues to resonate with many, many people throughout Saskatchewan.

I was pleased that her work on behalf of the WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) widows has finally brought some results. This is an issue she made a personal crusade. These women would have been ignored had it not been for her work. I salute all members who have decided to return to private life and I wish them well.

For myself, I have decided to stand again as a Liberal candidate. Some have questioned this decision in view of some of the problems we have experienced the past few years. I do not attempt to minimize those problems. However I want to remind, I want to remind hon. members that our party has existed since before Confederation in Canada and since before the creation of this province in Saskatchewan. No institution which has lasted literally for centuries, with a history that long, has not had a few chapters in its story which are not unpleasant and embarrassing.

However may I also say that no institution can possibly endure for such a long period unless it has contributed materially to the

betterment of society and unless it speaks in some important and fundamental ways to human need and aspiration. The Liberal Party is not only the first and oldest party in Saskatchewan, but what is more, it has a philosophy which can point this province to a prosperous and a harmonious future. It was Premier Blakeney who once noticed and said that the cemetery is full of people who have predicted the demise of the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Party is a moderate and inclusive party. It believes that the surest way to advance this or any society is to bring together all groups and individuals in a spirit of mutual respect seeking to balance the interests of each group and individual, never preferring the interests of one over the other. In terms of Saskatchewan, this means we need a moderate and inclusive party which seeks to bring together urban and rural, aboriginal and non-native, northern and southern, women and men, farmers, business people, and wage earners.

Unhappily, Mr. Speaker, not all parties share this view of society. The re-election strategy of the NDP seems to be to win big in the cities and the North and to ignore the rest of the province. In contrast, the new Saskatchewan Party has carved out for itself a moderately successful niche in seeking to represent rural, middle-class, white voters.

Neither party seems to have a fully inclusive view of this province. Both seem to be prepared to carve it up, providing of course they receive the larger share. I give the Premier and the NDP government full marks in bringing back fiscal integrity to a government and a province which was drowning in debt. They deserve credit for that accomplishment, and it must be noted.

But that said, I and many other people in this province are asking, what now? Where is the plan for the economic diversification of the province? Where is the plan to deal with the reality that we live next door to the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country? How will we keep our entrepreneurial and investor class if we continue to charge them among the highest taxes in Canada?

(1630)

Where is the concern for our young people, who continue to be economic refugees, taking their education and their skills and, yes, their taxes elsewhere? Where is the plan to deal with the burgeoning Aboriginal population?

Why, I have to ask, is there no sense of urgency to make sure that our Aboriginal young people will have the education . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order. Now hon. members will recognize that they don't need to call their messages across the floor in order to have them heard and put in the record. There's plenty of opportunity to enter into the debate. I'll ask for the co-operation of all hon. members of the House to allow the hon. member for North Battleford to continue his debate uninterrupted.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People are asking . . .

The Speaker: — Order.

Mr. Hillson: — People are asking why is there no sense of urgency on the part of this country to deal with the large number of Aboriginal young people who need education, training, and jobs, to ensure that they will become full-participating members in the economy. In short, where is the plan for the economic renewal of Saskatchewan? Failing such a plan we will never be able to fill the potholes, catch up on hospital waiting lists, retire the debt, or repair crumbling schools and university buildings.

Mr. Speaker, we were all distressed last year to see that Saskatchewan had the poorest record of job creation in all of Canada. This is a tragedy not only because of the lost opportunities for the young people who are forced to leave our province to carve their future elsewhere. It is unacceptable for those of us who remain. The Liberal caucus has done a remarkable job in focusing on the problems of deteriorating government services especially in the areas of health care, roads, and education.

The provincial government has responded with two quite contradictory answers. First they tell us there are no problems. We have the best health system in the world. Everybody is happy. When that line is seen to be not working, they tell us that all the problems, the problems they refuse to admit exist anyway, are the fault of the federal government. If only Ottawa gave us more money everything would be fine. Well Ottawa will be giving Saskatchewan some 140 million new, extra dollars this year. We shall see if this answers the problems of nursing shortages, threatened hospital closures, long waiting lists, and a system which appears to value bureaucrats over front-line health workers.

The contradictory answers of the government extend to the areas of highways and education. They say it is Ottawa's fault that the potholes, whose existence the NDP refuse to acknowledge, are not getting fixed.

Last year the federal government announced a major new initiative to assist post-secondary students. The provincial NDP were highly critical despite the fact our senior university in Saskatoon is faced with collapsing buildings. Again, the provincial government will not admit that the roofs of many of our schools and colleges are literally falling in. But if they are, then they say the people should blame those in Ottawa and not Regina.

The Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday made no mention of Saskatchewan's poor record of job creation. Indeed the government appears to think that they are doing just fine and everything is great. If you didn't know better you would think that we were leading the nation. You would think we were the envy of Alberta instead of trying desperately to keep up with Newfoundland.

I wish to speak on the farm crisis. I was concerned last week when there were newspaper reports that officials in the provincial government were saying that Saskatchewan people wouldn't be able to enjoy a tax break this year because the province has had to participate with the federal government in coming to the aid of the province's farmers.

To me this statement could easily be interpreted as an

unfortunate attempt to divide this province and to invite urban residents to resent and blame farmers for the high taxes we all pay.

Instead of being so slow and reluctant to join in the farm aid package, would it not have been better, Mr. Speaker, if our government had come together with Ottawa originally to attempt to correct some of the unfortunate aspects of the farm aid package?

Specifically, I have been disappointed that because of the rule about 70 per cent income over the past three years, there are many producers in the north-west of Saskatchewan who will be unable to receive any assistance because they have suffered drought three years in a row and their baseline of income is too low to allow them to participate in the farm aid package this year.

I've spoken to Mr. Vanclief, the federal Agriculture minister. He admits there are holes in the program and that more will have to be done to address these needs. How much better it would have been if our government had joined with Ottawa initially to try and correct some of these inequities and some of the deficiencies of the program.

Why the NDP found it so objectionable to come to the aid of the province's most important industry has not been explained. The closest they have come to offering an explanation was to say that the farm aid commodity price crisis is the same as the ice storms in central Canada, the floods in Quebec, or the Red River floods in Manitoba. They neglected to add that in each and every one of those cases, both the federal and provincial governments in those provinces involved also joined with Ottawa in coming to the aid of their citizens. Even the province of Newfoundland joined with the federal government to assist its fishers when the cod fishery collapsed in that province.

Only in Saskatchewan does the provincial government appear to take the position that all assistance must come from the federal government and that only Ottawa has a responsibility to maintain the family farm, preserve medicare, rebuild our highways, save our universities and find a way to spark economic growth. I say with all due respect, if the NDP is right about this then why would we bother having a provincial government at all?

However, Mr. Speaker, I wish to add that if I am critical of the NDP for attempting to pass off all its failures and shortcomings on the federal government, I am at one with the government on the need to preserve a strong federal government. For many decades all leaders in this province, regardless of party stripe, have agreed on the necessity of preserving a strong central government. It is simply and fundamentally not in the interests of Saskatchewan to dismantle the federal government.

For this reason, I share the concern of our Premier when Mr. Elwin Hermanson said that he thought that we should get rid of the Canada Health Act. Mr. Speaker, if we abolish the Canada Health Act, we abolish national standards in health care. If we abolish national standards in health care, that ultimately has to hurt provinces such as Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and the other less wealthy provinces.

Dismantling national standards may work for Alberta but it is fundamentally against the interests of Saskatchewan. And anyone who says we don't need national standards in this country is pushing an Alberta agenda; he is not pushing a Saskatchewan agenda because he is working against the interests of Saskatchewan. And I make that comment in the most non-partisan of ways because all people in Saskatchewan have recognized for many years that a strong central government is key to the future survival and prosperity of this province.

Well if the NDP seems to have designed its election strategy with little or no reference to rural Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Party appears to think it can win by appealing to certain groups and areas while ignoring others. I am especially fearful that the Saskatchewan Party will stir up division between Aboriginal and non-Native peoples. I hope very much that I am wrong.

We all know there are some extremely serious issues which must be addressed. Treaty land entitlement, taxation, self-government, the rights of First Nation peoples and other Aboriginal groups such as non-status and Metis. We all know that it is economically and morally unacceptable to have a group of our population with far too high rates of unemployment, welfare, suicide, crime, and alcoholism.

We all know that the days of white people making the decisions for the Aboriginal population are over. It never worked very well anyway.

However, as we attempt to empower Aboriginal people to control their own destiny, new challenges also have emerged. Certainly, it is trading one evil for another if First Nations' governments develop into an oppressive system where most of the money filters into the hands of a small elite.

These serious issues will have to be approached in a non-confrontational manner by men and women of good will on both sides. We cannot afford to use these issues as a lever to prey on people's fears and prejudices. We cannot afford to use division as a pry to tear our society apart.

Mr. Speaker, divisions exist in all communities. In the Liberal view, it is the work of the political process to work through these divisions so that society can move forward together, with each group and individual confident that he or she is a respected and contributing member of that society.

Which brings me in conclusion to the proposed Respect for Constituents Act. As I understand this legislation, it would require an MLA to remain with the caucus to which he or she was elected, or else resign and seek a by-election. It has of course been inspired by the formation of the Saskatchewan Party.

I understand the emotions behind this legislation, but I still question if it is on the right track. Under our constitution voters do not elect parties, they elect individuals. Once elected those members are charged with exercising their responsibilities according to their best judgment of the public interest, and according to the interests and wishes of their constituents. If they fail in that duty they shall of course pay the price in due

course at the next election.

I know that government members will salute the fine example set by the member for Athabasca. When he could no longer support the party to which he had initially been elected, he resigned and sought re-election as a member of his new party. He is to be congratulated both on the manner in which he changed parties and on the historic vote of confidence he received from his constituents.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1645)

Mr. Hillson: — I am proud, I am proud to say that the member from Athabasca was a personal friend before he left our caucus, and I'm proud to say that he continues to be a personal friend today.

However, much as one may approve of his conduct, should it be enshrined in law? Is it good public policy to attempt to limit the actions and conscience of elected members? Is it good public policy to say that a member must remain with his or her caucus even though he or she no longer believes in the direction it is taking or even though it may be on an entirely different course from the one the member thought he had subscribed to?

I share the frustration of the NDP with the manner in which the Saskatchewan Party was established. In an age when we are striving for open and accountable politics it does none of us in this Assembly any credit when the official opposition of this Assembly was formed when eight people met one night in a motel room.

I note with interest, I note with interest that Elwin Hermanson said yesterday that the five Liberals who crossed the floor were not pressured to resign their seats. I found his choice of words interesting. Only the Liberals crossed the floor according to Mr. Hermanson. The Conservatives did not apparently cross the floor. The Tories did not abandon their party. They did not double-cross the Conservatives when they took on a new name and passed a resolution saying that the Conservatives would not run candidates in the next election.

It was, according to Mr. Hermanson, only the Liberals who crossed the floor. The Conservatives were apparently merely taking on a bit of camouflage. It is interesting that Mr. Hermanson agrees with other members of this House that the Conservatives remained with their party albeit under a different name and that only the Liberals actually changed parties.

Before I leave this point I want to make one last comment. According to The Election Act, 1996, if the Conservative Party does not run at least 10 candidates in the next election then all trust funds presently held by that party will have to be turned over to the people and province of Saskatchewan.

My question is, will the Conservative Party follow through on the motion it passed to put forward no candidates in the coming provincial election and then remit the slush funds to the province of Saskatchewan? Or — or, I ask — will we find that in the coming election there will be 10 Conservatives quietly nominated, never to be heard or seen from again, 10 shadow

candidates, so that that party can retain the slush funds for whatever other purposes they may have?

But that said, I continue to have questions as to whether the respect for constituents Act is the proper way to proceed. As I say, I don't think now at this stage is a time for any of us to throw stones. We will all face our voters; we will all be held to account. And whether or not we have properly discharged our duties, I am prepared now to leave to the electorate. They are the ones who are going to pass judgment, and not the hon. members of this House.

In conclusion, I want to recall for you an incident which occurred shortly after I decided to go into politics. As a lawyer, I was told that it is important for politicians to attend auction sales. So I went to Kramer Auction and I showed some interest in a farm implement, which of course turned out to be a manure spreader.

The assembled farmers wanted to chip in and buy it for me as they were sure I would need it in my new profession. Then someone in the back of the crowd piped up and said he didn't think I needed a manure spreader as I already appeared to have the knack down pretty good.

Well, Mr. Speaker, from some of the statements we have heard so far in this House, from my friends and colleagues across the way, and I think there will be much more of it in the weeks to come, I want to say my hat is off. We are the amateurs. As spreaders of manure, you are the masters and we will never be in your league. We will simply have to rely on the good sense of the electorate to preserve the political future of the Liberal party of Saskatchewan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Renaud: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to stand up in this Legislative Assembly and proudly support this government's road map for this session of the legislature of the province of Saskatchewan.

The throne speech is that road map, Mr. Speaker. It's a road map for the session and the member from Redberry Lake did a fine job in moving the Speech from the Throne. And it was seconded in grace by the member from Battleford-Cut Knife.

While I was sitting here listening to the member from North Battleford and his concern about the respect for constituency Act, I just have to say this one comment before I get into more detailed response to the speech . . . the throne speech. And what I want to say is that it is not the MLA's privilege to change party affiliation in the dark of night, or at any time, without going back to the people who elected them.

MLAs represent their constituents' wishes and their party policy, and once and for all we have to end the possibility that members would cross the floor and join another political party and sit for that new political party without permission from the people who elected them.

A few days ago — in fact on Friday, March 12 — I sought the nomination for the NDP in Carrot River Valley for a third term, and, Mr. Speaker, that was for several reasons. The first reason

was that I wanted to continue to work for and with the great constituents I have in Carrot River Valley.

You know, it's a large constituency, and it's basically from White Fox on the north-east corner; if you drive down and across the North Saskatchewan River or the Saskatchewan River you'll come to the community of Nipawin, a beautiful community of about 4,500 people. If you continue south, there's the village of Codette, and then if you go east from there, you'll come to a fine community of Carrot River and Red Earth and Shoal Lake, two First Nations that I have that are in the constituency of Carrot River Valley.

And then if you move south of there you come to the communities of Arborfield and you then move east to Crooked River, Peesane, Prairie River; Hudson Bay, moose capital of the world; Greenwater, a beautiful provincial park to the south end of the constituency of Carrot River Valley; and Chelan, Bjorkdale — fine communities, fine people, Mr. Speaker. And I wanted to represent them again, and so I did seek that nomination. And I want to tell the folks of the Assembly here that I was successful.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Renaud: — And so I will carry the NDP banner with pride in the next provincial election — whenever that might be. And you know, Mr. Speaker, even though there will be an Act that will say that if I wanted to change political party, that I would go back to the people and ask them for their support in a by-election, well it won't have to happen to me, Mr. Speaker, because I am proud to be a New Democrat.

I am proud of the policies that they put forward. And I'm very proud of the throne speech that we presented here in the fourth session of the twenty-third legislature. So that won't happen to me, and I'm very pleased about that. But I do believe it's an important Act that we will be introducing in this session.

The second reason that I sought the nomination, Mr. Speaker, is that I was very concerned that the Tories were trying to trick the electorate by hiding behind the Saskatchewan name. I really wondered if they could succeed in that, and that was a very great concern for me. And I thought that I should be here to at least let the public know in my constituency that these are really Tories, and hiding behind the Saskatchewan name is not going to change their policies or programs.

And then the other reason, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted to seek re-election and seek the approval of my party was because of the priorities and the direction and the leadership that this government has given to the citizens of the province over the last seven years.

You know we look at Saskatchewan and we think about it for a moment. It was selected the best province in the best country in which to live and raise a family.

And I think it was you, Mr. Speaker, that brought to my attention on one of your visits to a school in my constituency. And you were saying to the students that, you know, let's consider this for a moment. I don't know how many people there are in the world — is there six billion or six billion plus?

— I'm not sure of the exact numbers but that's probably fairly close. Then if you take a look at Saskatchewan, a small province in the middle of Canada with a population of a hundred . . . 1 million people and the United Nations decided that this is the best place in the best country in which to live and raise a family, that's quite an achievement, Mr. Speaker. And it's a credit to the people of Saskatchewan and to the government that leads the people of Saskatchewan.

I want to deal a bit about the . . . sort of the third reason before I deal with the second reason. The third reason, Mr. Speaker, the reason that I ran for nomination . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . That's right, Mr. Speaker, I see that the time is running a little short here and I'd certainly like to continue tomorrow.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to now adjourn the debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Speaker: — Why is the hon. member for Meadow Lake on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I don't know if I need leave for this. With leave, Mr. Speaker, to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training requests leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery I have a friend from my hometown of Goodsoil, Jean Lange, and I'd like all of the members here to welcome her here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

