

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### PRESENTING PETITIONS

**Mr. Krawetz:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of residents of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

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 retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition come from the communities of Melville and Yorkton. I so present.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — 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 finally show a serious commitment to roads and highways in Saskatchewan by urging it to increase its highway and road construction and maintenance budget by \$300 million over the next five years as called for in the Saskatchewan Party election platform.

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

These petitions come from the Gainsborough, Carnduff, and Saskatoon areas of the province. Mr. Speaker, I so present.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Speaker, as well to present a petition to the Assembly, reading the prayer:

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 retroactively with interest to April 17, 1985.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitions I have in my hand are signed by individuals from the Kamsack, Regina, Yorkton areas of the province. I so present.

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens who are very agitated with the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The petition 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.

And the signatures on this petition are from Regina, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

**Mr. McLane:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise again today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads as follows:

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 good folks out in the Lanigan, Plunkett area. And I so present.

**Mr. Aldridge:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions on behalf of people that are concerned about the cost price squeeze on the farm. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon provincial and federal governments to immediately take steps to end unfair world subsidies and provide farmers with prompt relief from declining incomes and act as watchdogs against rising input costs which are harming the rural economy.

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

Those who've signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Webb, Gull Lake, and Herbert. I so present.

**Mr. McPherson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join with my colleagues here today in bringing forward petitions. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to call upon the provincial government and SaskTel being wholly accountable to the people of Saskatchewan to immediately take steps to provide cellular coverage to this area so that residents can travel in winter with some assurance of safety.

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

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the Coronach, Willow Bunch, Rockglen area of the province. I so present.

**Mr. Hillson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I present a petition this morning . . . or this afternoon from petitioners from Battleford and North Battleford. And the prayer of relief reads as follows:

Your petitioners humbly pray that the intersection of Highway 40 and Highway 16 be relocated in order to

alleviate the unsafe condition and congestion at the entrance to the city of North Battleford.

I so present.

**Ms. Haverstock:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure again to present petitions on behalf of people who are most concerned with children with special needs. And I shall read the prayer as follows:

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 all the signatures today are from the Little Red River School on the Little Red Reserve, Mr. Speaker.

### READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province of Saskatchewan petitioning the Assembly on the following matters:

To cause the government to end its unfair tendering policies and immediately cancel the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement;

To have the Workers' Compensation Board Act amended to reinstate benefits and pensions to disenfranchised widows;

To cause the government to provide sufficient funding to staff and operate the dialysis machine located in Yorkton;

To cause the government to a chelation therapy . . . to add chelation therapy to the ensured services covered under medicare;

To call on the federal and provincial governments to dedicate a greater portion of fuel tax revenues towards road maintenance and construction;

To relocate Highway No. 40 to alleviate congestion at North Battleford;

To cause the government to provide essential funding and ensure delivery of diagnostic assessment and programming for children with learning disabilities.

### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 1999.

**Mr. Aldridge:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I

shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

Regarding the proposed development by American retail giant Wal-Mart to construct a retail outlet and parking area in Moose Jaw on land used by endangered burrowing owls for habitat: when will the Department of Environment and Resource Management decide whether an environmental assessment is necessary for this and related projects; if an environmental assessment or impact study is deemed necessary, will Wal-Mart be responsible for the cost; what steps is the department taking to ensure that all parties involved are in compliance with legislation protecting endangered species such as the burrowing owl; has the department studied what impact the loss of the birds would have on the eco-tourism potential of the city of Moose Jaw and similar projects in the Thunder Creek constituency?

**Ms. Haverstock:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following questions, and Mr. Speaker, they may seem repetitive and that's because I've resubmitted these one page at a time:

What number of children were diagnosed as severely learning disabled in 1989?

And with your indulgence, I just state straight through to 1998 on different pages.

Will the minister provide documentation that proves 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 students than the old formula?

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Education: 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, and specify and describe what measurements the Department of Education is using to determine "success"?

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice as well that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Trade Union Amendment Act (Repealing Successor Rights). As well, Mr. Speaker, to give notice that on Friday next move a first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Right to Work Act. And, Mr. Speaker, give notice that on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Democratic Unionism Act.

I so present.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Hon. Mr. Wiens:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you, and to all members of the legislature, a delegation here today as part of the celebrations of national Francophone Week. They are seated on the east side of your gallery, Mr. Speaker.

The members of your delegation, I think in part because I have fewer names than the number of people here, are Florent Bilodeau and Francine Powers with the Division scolaire francophone; Denis Desgagné, Lorraine Archambault,

Marjolaine Régis, Gracia Bellerose, Joanne Perreault from the ACFC (Association culturelle franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan); Thierry Sarny, Reda Loomis, Manon Guy, Claire Bélanger-Parker, from the Association canadienne-française de Regina; René Archambault from OMLO (official minority language office) and Sask Ed. Ron Kruzeniski was to be here, but I don't see him. Denise Boudreau, and from the Commission Culturelle Fransaskoise, Roger Lepage is here, and Ronald Labrecque, and Treena Abramson from the Office of French Language Co-ordination.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to join me and all others in welcoming this delegation on this important week.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I would also like to welcome the group from the French community, the Fransaskois, to the Assembly of Saskatchewan and I would ask all members of the Assembly to again welcome them and show their appreciation for the hard work and the dedication that the people of the ACFC and the whole French community have for Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hillson:** — Yes, I also wish to welcome the delegation which is here to help us observe la Semaine de la francophonie. And they were in North Battleford last week to open L'École Père Mercure, which I'll be speaking of in a minute.

I also wish to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Joel Peterson, who I'd ask to stand, and I would advise hon. members to please welcome him as he is the man who has promised to turbocharge the Liberal campaign. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** — Order. Now I am sure hon. members will want to come to order and be sure that they clearly hear who are the guests being introduced today.

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members in the Assembly four special guests from the Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians. They had been with us, some of them, earlier as we were birthing their legislation through this chamber and are certainly looking forward to a special ceremony this evening. Many of my colleagues will join me in being with them tonight.

But today I would like to introduce to you John Walker, president of SASTT (Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians), James Hoffman, vice-president of SASTT, Charles Brimley from the Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists in Ottawa — and welcome him to snowy spring in Saskatchewan — and Neil Johnson, the past president of SASTT.

I'd ask all colleagues to join me in welcoming them today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet I would also like to draw to the attention of the Assembly, through you to my colleagues, the presence in the gallery opposite, 32 public servants who are with us this afternoon to observe proceedings. They are from the Public Service Commission, Justice, Liquor and Gaming, Economic and Co-operative Development, Social Services, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, and Energy and Mines.

They're the men and women who provide expertise and technical support to formulate policy, consult and serve the public, and answer questions that are put to us in the Assembly from our members opposite. I would ask all members to join in welcoming them as they go through the proceedings today and then have a tour. And we'll have information provided to them on the role of the Assembly and what is accomplished in this noble building.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all colleagues to join in welcoming our 32 public servants with us today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of the Assembly I'd like to introduce a lady who has joined us in the Assembly today, Ms. Rose Polsom. And I believe most members are very familiar with Ms. Polsom's efforts. But I would also on behalf of all members like to extend to Ms. Polsom our deepest sympathy on the recent passing of her dear husband. We trust that you will indeed just appreciate our sympathy and God be with you.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you two constituents of mine from the Saltcoats constituency, Lyle and Jean Straker. If you would stand. Lyle and Jean Straker are successful farmers from the Saltcoats constituency but are also finding it hard times to survive on the farm as every other farmer in the province is.

So I would ask the Assembly to join with me and welcome them here today.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, I want to join with my colleague, the member for Moosomin, to welcome Ms. Polsom to the Legislative Assembly today and to let her know that all members feel equally and our hearts go out to her in these very difficult times for her. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McLane:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus I'd like to welcome a delegation here from SASTT today, but in particular Mr. Neil Johnson. Because of his presence here today, that makes two of us that were raised in that wonderful community of Liberty, Saskatchewan.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

## National Francophone Week

**Mr. Kasperski:** — Merci, Monsieur le Président. Je voudrais annoncer que le semaine du quinze au vingt-et-un mars a été officiellement désignée Semaine de la francophonie en Saskatchewan. Je suis heureux de souligner à l'Assemblée que la semaine est placée cette année sous le thème, "La francophonie canadienne: un passé composé vers un futur simple."

Les francophones de la Saskatchewan ont tout lieu d'être fiers de leur passé. Comment ne pas admirer le courage de ces premiers colons francophones qui, avant même la formation de la province, sont venus de la France, de la Belgique, de la Suisse et de Québec pour habiter ce grand pays solitaire? Affrontant l'inconnu, ils sont venus chercher ici une vie meilleure pour eux-mêmes, leurs familles et leurs descendants.

Ils ont légué à leurs descendants une langue, une culture, des institutions que ceux-ci, grâce à leur dynamisme, leur vitalité et leur vigueur culturelle, ont la ferme intention de préserver, d'améliorer et de moderniser pour le plus grand profit de la Saskatchewan dans son ensemble et l'édification des siècles à venir.

Puissent les Francophones de la Saskatchewan continuer à prospérer et à servir nous tous leurs concitoyens. Merci.

(Translation: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to announce that the week of March 15-21 has been officially designated Francophone Week in Saskatchewan. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the week is being celebrated this year around the theme, "Canada's Francophone Communities — From a Rich Past to a Shared Future.")

Saskatchewan's Francophones have every reason to be proud of their past. How can one not admire the courage of those first French-speaking settlers, who, even before the creation of the province, came from France, Belgium, Switzerland, and from Quebec, to live in this great solitary land? Confronting the unknown, they came here seeking a better life for themselves, their families and their descendants.

Having lived their lives to the fullest, they passed on to their descendants a language, a culture and institutions which those descendants, through their dynamism, vitality and cultural vigour, have the firm intention to preserve, improve and modernize for the greater good of Saskatchewan as a whole and to build on for centuries to come.

May Saskatchewan's Francophones continue to prosper and be of service to their fellow citizens. Thank you.)

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to recognize National Francophone Week. During this week we recognize and celebrate all francophones, especially those living in Saskatchewan.

La Communauté Fransaskoise est très riche en tout ce qui concerne la langue et la culture. Cette communauté forte

apporte à tous et à toutes qui y ont contact une expérience enrichissante et fructueuse.

(Translation: The francophone community in Saskatchewan celebrates a rich culture and language. This culturally strong community brings to each and every person involved a fruitful and enriching experience.)

Alors, profitez en professeurs et élèves, des ressources culturelles que la Saskatchewan a à offrir!

(Translation: Teachers and students, benefit from the cultural resources Saskatchewan has to offer you.)

Célébrez la culture Fransaskoise, découvrez-la et tout ce qu'elle a à nous apprendre.

(Translation: Celebrate the francophone culture in our province; discover it and all that you can learn from it.)

Enrich your lives and the lives of your students. The youth is the key in preserving the French culture.

On behalf of my colleagues in the Saskatchewan Party, I wish an excellent week to all the Fransaskois and Fransaskoise, and to every person who participates in this cultural experience.

Merci. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Hillson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Semaine de la francophonie, National Francophone Week. It is being marked in The Battlefords with the recent opening of Ecole Père Mercure.

From the very earliest days of settlement in The Battlefords, Jackfish, Delmas, and Bresaylor districts, the francophone population has been a vibrant and much appreciated addition to the rich cultural fabric of the northwest.

Father Cochin was one of the most important figures of the story of 1885 and the founder of the community which bears his name.

He was followed as priest at St. Rose de Lima Parish in Cochin by Pere Mercure. Father Mercure was a tireless promoter of the French language. Due to his efforts many young people in our area participated in student exchanges in France. Pere Mercure's fight for French rights eventually resulted in the Supreme Court of Canada decision which cemented the rights of francophones in Western Canada.

The slogan of Ecole Pere Mercure is "Hier Aujourd'hui Demain." With its 20 students the school will help ensure that the French population of The Battlefords is indeed not only a proud part of our past and present but of our future as well.

I ask all members to join with me in saluting the students and staff of Ecole Pere Mercure and of all of our French neighbours in this National Francophone Week.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians Act Proclaimed

**Mr. Koenker:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is one happy day for Saskatchewan Applied Science Technologists and Technicians or SASTT for short. And that's because today the Act which defines SASTT as a professional association, is being proclaimed and celebrated.

The significance of this Act is that now, like architects, surveyors, engineers, and other professions, SASTT will at long last be able to regulate itself. And self-regulation is a privilege delegated to a professional group by the legislature only when it has strong professional and ethical standards for members that clearly serve the public interest.

And that's exactly what SASTT does day in and day out across Saskatchewan on oil rigs, in mines, hospitals, in agriculture and other sectors, they provide environmental monitoring, quality inspection of construction sites, geotechnical investigations of proposed sites, safety inspections of clinical medical equipment, among other duties. Modern tasks and necessary ones for the welfare of Saskatchewan people.

And that's why we celebrate the achievements of SASTT and their contributions to Saskatchewan today.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### International Year of the Old Person

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the official opposition in recognition of the International Year of the Old Person. I'm not sure if my colleagues chose me to speak about this for a particular reason, Mr. Speaker, but regardless, it is to my delight to rise in awareness of this auspicious occasion.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 1999 as the International Year of the Old Person as the world population is aging and as the change in demographics holds a special social economic and spiritual significance.

The United Nations theme is towards a society for all ages, with a goal to foster international awareness of the importance of seniors' roles in society and the need for intergenerational respect and support.

This theme highlights the importance of initiating dialogue between all generations, and the co-operation on seniors' issues, the need to involve seniors in decision making, and the recognition that seniors play an important and beneficial role in Canadian society.

The International Year of the Old Person, 1999, offers community across the country an opportunity to recognize seniors and celebrate their achievements and contributions. In relation to this event Health Canada has made funds available specifically for local Saskatchewan communities in support of the International Year of the Old Person.

I would like to commend the United Nations General Assembly for attributing importance to seniors all over the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### International Women's Day

**Ms. Lorje:** — On International Women's Day, Mr. Speaker, I sent a cartoon to several of my women colleagues. It featured a cigar chomping CEO (chief executive officer) saying to his assembled male executives, "Gentlemen, we must cut expenses in half, so I'm firing each of you and replacing you with a woman."

That cartoon is a reminder of the unfortunate reality that women still earn on average about 73 per cent of what men earn. Nevertheless, the social and economic barriers that have restricted women for centuries are coming down. Slowly, but they're changing.

But not everywhere. The leader of the party that dares not speak its name, Mr. Hermanson, said last week that he's having trouble finding women candidates because quote, "their concerns are with the home and they don't like dealing with conflict." What an unfathomable comment.

Mr. Hermanson and his macho colleagues should realize that women are more than delighted to do battle with quaint and archaic attitudes like that precisely because our concerns are with the home as well as the workplace and our society. Sometimes promoting our concerns does lead to conflict and that's too bad. But I assure Mr. Hermanson that women politicians on this side of the House are more than equal to the task.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

### St. Patrick's Day

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's entirely by happy coincidence that today we announce Francophone Week on St. Patrick's Day, but it is an interesting coincidence nonetheless. In Europe, from which come both cultures, the momentum today is towards European union.

Currencies, trading barriers, language barriers, even borders are breaking down in part of a world that has spawned much conflict in the millennium we are leaving behind. The push towards union is difficult but inevitable in a world getting smaller, and that is good. However, union does not include loss of historical, cultural, and lingual distinctiveness. The heritage of language and laughter the Irish have given Canada and the world will be with us always.

This day when we celebrate not so much Ireland but the travails and triumphs of the Irish far from home we should remember descendants of Irish immigrants make up more than 10 per cent of Canada's population. They grace us with their sprightliness and their grit not to mention their enjoyment of life.

So on this St. Patrick's Day and from this member of the Irish clan, I wish you all the luck of the Irish. Erin Go Braugh.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Hafford Hospital**

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. My question is for the Minister of Health.

Madam Minister, one of the communities that is very concerned about the future of its hospital is Hafford in the Redberry constituency. One week from today the Saskatchewan Party will be hosting a town hall meeting in Hafford to discuss the future of health care in that community. We have asked the Parkland Health Board to release its three-year strategic plan for the district so we can see what your government's plans are for the Hafford Hospital.

Madam Minister, the Chair of the Parkland Health Board has told us that he has sent it to Regina but they're not allowed to release it until it's approved or changed by the Department of Health. Madam Minister, what kind of local control is that? What are you hiding?

Do you plan to close the Hafford Hospital? Will you release the three-year strategic plan for the Parkland Health District?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, once again our friends in the Tory Party are using this list of 36 rural hospital closures. I want to say to everyone assembled, including the people that are listening today, that it is not the intentions of this government to close any rural hospitals. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what the members opposite may not know is that in Hafford we have just added five long-term care beds to the Hafford facility.

Mr. Speaker, I know that these people are prepared to do and say anything in order to get themselves a few more seats in this provincial Assembly once the election is called. I can assure the good folks of Hafford that they will continue to have their hospital beds in Hafford.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ministers resort to misinformation whenever they don't want to provide the information. I'd like to clarify two of those misinformations — we're neither friends nor Tories.

Madam Minister, Hafford was one of the communities on the hit list . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order, order, order. Now hon. members will recognize . . . Order, order.

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hafford was one of the communities on the hit list released by your department a couple of weeks ago, yet you refuse to say what exactly the plans are for the Hafford Hospital. You've put a gag order on the district health board. You've said no changes will be made to rural hospitals without community support. Why don't you tell us exactly what your plans are for the Hafford Hospital and see if it has community support?

Madam Minister, before you sewed her mouth shut, your junior

minister admitted that the NDP (New Democratic Party) plans to close more rural hospitals. Which ones, Madam Minister? Is Hafford one of them?

Madam Minister, what are you hiding? What are your plans for the Hafford Hospital and why won't you release the three-year strategic plans?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If it walks like a duck and if it sounds like a duck, it must be a duck. This member was elected under the Tory banner in 1991 and 1995, he came here as a Tory and, as far as I'm concerned, he is elected as a Tory.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Now I know that these people want to be . . . they want to get themselves elected and they will say and do anything . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Now hon. members will recognize that the question was a difficult time being heard, and so it is with the answer. And I'll ask for the co-operation of all members of the House.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, what I have said, and I will say it again: this government has no intentions of closing any rural hospitals. Now I've got a report here from the *Leader-Post* March 3, 1999, and I quote:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson couldn't guarantee his party would keep the doors open at all 36 hospitals with a low average daily bed . . .

In fact he would have to do an evaluation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what is their position? We've said we're not going to close rural hospitals. What's their position?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. D'Autremont:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister's denials remind me of the Assiniboia by-election in 1987 when the members opposite ran around the constituency saying the government of the day was going to close every hospital. Well in '91 the government changed and they did it — they closed the hospitals.

Madam Minister, we don't know what the NDP plans are about closing the Hafford Hospital. But one thing in that constituency that we do know is going to close real soon and that's the NDP MLA's (Member of the Legislative Assembly) constituency office right after the next election.

Madam Minister, people in Hafford are concerned about the future of their hospital. They have a right to know what your plans are. Why does the plan have to be sent to Regina first? What are you hiding in the three-year strategic study?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, we have no plans to close rural hospitals. What I would like to be able to ask the member, as far as I can see from a report in the Moosomin newspaper dated Monday, November 23, 1998, the Moosomin mayor asks the Leader of the Tory Party, Mr. Hermanson, he said if you're going to go into this election and talk about health care, I think you should have a plan. I think you should be talking about a plan not a study.

What does Mr. Hermanson say? Quote, "We've been able to identify some of the problem, but we haven't been able to identify the solution."

Well, Mr. Speaker, we aren't going to close any rural hospitals.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Farm Land Security Board Ruling**

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order, order. Now I'll ask the co-operation of members on both sides of the House to allow the hon. member for Saltcoats to be able to put his question — including his colleagues.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Mr. Minister, just a few months ago your Ag minister got up in front of the cameras and declared the farm crisis over. Well it may come as a surprise to the NDP government, but the farm crisis is still with us and it may be worse than we thought. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farmers are fighting for their lives through the crisis the NDP says doesn't exist.

And given the woefully inadequate farm aid package the NDP negotiated with the federal government, one option many farmers are being forced to consider is selling out, except The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act makes it impossible to sell your farm to anyone living outside Saskatchewan. It's a Catch-22, Mr. Speaker. Farmers can't survive in NDP Saskatchewan and yet the government is stopping them from selling their land to the highest bidder.

Mr. Minister, do you think restricting farmers from selling their land to the highest bidder is somehow good for the future of agriculture in Saskatchewan?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that in Saskatchewan we have had very orderly legislation to deal with farmland ownership and I think it's quite clear that during the Tory years this legislation was expanded and revised. And we're actually dealing with legislation from that time when some of the members opposite were part of the government.

The Farm Land Security Board is an independent quasi-judicial board that has been legislatively charged with the administration of corporate and non-resident farmland ownership matters. Members of the legislature must respect the independence of the board to adjudicate these applications without interference. And I would say that if there's further

information that can be presented to that kind of a board then it should be presented there, but this is an independent board.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Minister, that board appointed by you, your supporters are acting under laws of the Government of Saskatchewan. So you can change them; you have that power.

Mr. Minister, Lyle Straker is a constituent of mine. He and his family farm the land his family homesteaded at the beginning of the century. Lyle wanted to pass the farm on to his children too, but the farm economy is so bad that Lyle's kids don't want to farm. So Lyle and Jean are looking to sell their farm. In fact, another farmer 60 miles down the road has made them a very fair offer, an offer that will give the Strakers a decent return.

But Mr. Speaker, the NDP government says it's illegal to make the sale because the buyer lives in Manitoba. Mr. Minister, this is ridiculous. Your NDP government policies are driving people off the land, and your laws are keeping them from selling their land at a fair price.

Manitoba and Alberta have no restrictions on Canadians buying . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Now the hon. member's been extremely lengthy in his preamble. And I'll ask him to go directly to his question now.

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, will you support the Saskatchewan Party legislation allowing farmers to sell their land to any Canadian citizen regardless of where they live?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, we have set up an orderly process through an independent board to deal with these matters, and the farm ownership provisions under The Saskatchewan Farm Security Act allow Canadian non-residents to acquire up to half a section, 320 acres, without Farm Land Security Board approval. The board will also accommodate non-resident purchases above that limit if the result doesn't negatively impact the farm community.

It can't depart from the intent of the Act for the benefit of a particular vendor. The forum for dealing with this matter is with that board. If there is further information that's available then the matter should be brought back to the board. We've set up an orderly process to do that — that's how we do it in Saskatchewan. And I think that's the remedy.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### **Grain Handlers' Strike**

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my next question is for the Minister of Agriculture or his designate. Mr. Minister, farmers are facing a full-blown crisis with grain prices approaching historical lows. Unfortunately it didn't help that the NDP government refused to stand up for farmers while Ottawa was coming up with a totally inadequate package.

And, Mr. Speaker, it only gets worse. Now farmers are facing yet another threat to their livelihoods. This week 70 striking Canadian Grain Commission workers in Vancouver have shut down the movement of grain across the prairies. Farmers are fighting to keep their farms afloat in the midst of a major crisis in agriculture, and now we have 70 strikers holding up the entire agriculture industry for ransom. The situation is absolutely ridiculous and has to stop.

Now, Mr. Minister, what is your government doing to bring an immediate end to the grain handlers' strike on the west coast and to ensure farmers are not held responsible for additional expenses as a result of the strike?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, the minister in charge of Highways . . . I believe the minister in charge of Agriculture is not with us today. The government has communicated at various levels to federal authorities who are in charge of this particular matter that we want this strike to be completed and the blockage, the stoppage, ceased as quickly as possible. We cannot sustain the loss of markets and the loss of income for Saskatchewan farmers at a very critical time as it is now. We want this settled and settled quickly, and if not, legislation should be considered because the economy of Saskatchewan demands it.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, I'm glad to hear you say that but I kind of wonder if you've called your friend, Mr. Chrétien, to put an end to this nonsense.

Mr. Premier, the fact of the matter is that the NDP refuse to negotiate on a federal farm aid package until it was a done deal. Then you refused to help fund the aid program until the public pressure got too hot.

Mr. Speaker, when the grain handlers went on strike for the first time in January, the NDP did nothing. Now the province has put the road bans on; the farmers couldn't get their grain to the elevator even if there wasn't a strike. Mr. Speaker, following question period today, the Sask Party will be moving an emergency motion calling on the federal government to immediately legislate striking west coast grain workers back to work so the farmers can move their grain once again.

Mr. Premier, will you and your government finally stand up for Saskatchewan farmers by supporting this motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I must answer the hon. member by speaking first to the preface of this question. I think Mr. Hermanson and the Saskatchewan Party — so-called the Tory Party — probably did the most damaging infliction of hurt on the farmers of Saskatchewan when Mr. Hermanson went to Ottawa at the time when the Minister of Agriculture and the time that I and others of the members of this cabinet were arguing with Ottawa, urging for a proper farm aid program. Your leader was in Ottawa saying don't believe the Government of Saskatchewan. We've got the money. And in

the consequence, we are stuck with a Bill which is unfair to all the taxpayers and most unfair to the people who are farmers themselves who have to pay the biggest chunk of their own relief.

You say you're acting in the best interests of the farmers; I'm telling you, you went out there and you damaged the farmers by that kind of cheap politics and we're not going to play cheap politics like you are.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Funding for Regina Health District

**Mr. McLane:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health. Can the minister tell us if she is going to provide the \$40 million for the Regina Health District to cover their cost overruns on the Plains, and more importantly, how much more do they feel the Regina Health District needs to make the Pasqua and General hospitals first class tertiary centres would be?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member very much for the question. As I indicated yesterday the cost overruns that these folks are associating with the Plains amount to about \$12 million. Those costs are associated with some upgrading of building code and fire safety. In addition the Regina Health District has also over and above Project '98, enhanced services to the people in Regina and southern Saskatchewan.

The member may not know this but the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) has been installed and it's becoming operational. That's an added cost.

The member may not know that we have a new cardiac cath lab which strictly helps those people with cardiac difficulties get access to service very, very quickly.

We have a burn unit. We have a new mental health facility. We have a women's health facility. We have new space for a spiral CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the people of southern Saskatchewan have access to much better technology and health services now in this city and I wonder why that member is opposed to it.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McLane:** — And, Madam Minister, you forgot to add that you have unprecedented waiting lists in this province. Add that to your long list of accomplishments.

Madam Minister, the Regina Health District is far behind other districts in western Canada in hiring many new health care workers. It needs millions more in increased annual operating costs and needs to spend millions more for capital equipment and new bed construction.

I ask the minister if she agrees with this statement: that the Regina Health District is several years behind other tertiary



centres in its ability to fund many such programs. Admit it.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well I think I know where that statement is coming from but I want to check the source. I think I've had the . . . I'm recalling that . . . but it may come from a report that actually, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Regina Health District to engage in and that was the task team on the 5-5-4. And for those people listening today, on December 2 the Associate Minister of Health and myself announced the task team to look at surgical waiting times in the province of Saskatchewan.

At 3:30 this afternoon the task team is going to be releasing the results and the recommendations. We realize that there are people that are waiting too long for some surgical procedures in the province of Saskatchewan and we're going to do everything we can to implement those recommendations. And the budget is coming on March 26 and we'll have money available to assist health districts with the task of reviewing . . . of reducing waiting lists and waiting times in Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McLane:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Madam Minister, that statement does come from the Barriers to Access report, a report from the Regina Health District that probably the minister should have read. Or did the minister not read the report, or is it laying beside the nursing shortage report that you didn't read either, Madam Minister?

In case the minister has not read it in detail, the report states that about 185 new full-time employees — that's nurses, technicians, and support staff — are needed. That's on top of the 120 virtual nurses. About 10 million is needed in increased annual operating costs, and about 14 million is needed for capital equipment and new bed construction — new bed construction. And as the report states, that is just to meet current standards.

Madam Minister, have you read the report? And will she meet the health district's bare minimum request?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, what that member may not know is that I met with a group of physicians in the city of Regina shortly before Christmas, and at that time I indicated to them that I would encourage the Regina Health District to undergo a task force review of the 5-5-4 in the city of Regina. I thought that this fit in very nicely to the December 2 announcement on the task team on surgical waiting lists.

The report has been provided by Dr. Bartlett, the CEO for the Regina Health District, to the task team on waiting lists. We will be releasing the recommendations from the task team this afternoon at 3:30, and I can assure the people of this province that when the budget is delivered on March 26th that we are going to do as much as we possibly can to provide funds to reduce waiting times in this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McLane:** — Madam Minister, the question is: are you going to release this report, which isn't very flattering for you?

Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that this report basically says that if the NDP hadn't wasted \$130 million in closing the Plains, that that money could have bought and paid for all the needed equipment; constructed, Mr. Speaker, 73 new beds; run the operations and eliminated waiting lists for the next 10 years; plus hire 185 new staff members. And this is just the bare minimum, Madam Minister — just the bare minimum.

Madam Minister, was blowing \$130 million on closing the Plains one of the mistakes your government admitted to in the Speech from the Throne yesterday?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well, I think the member is drawing an awfully long bow between the consolidation of services into the Regina General and the Pasqua. Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, we have a new space for the MRI and that's going to mean right now 5,000 people of the province of Saskatchewan get our MRI. With two new MRIs in this province we'll be able to provide more MRIs to the people of this province.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have an additional cardiac cath lab. That means that people that need angiograms are getting that service immediately. We don't have the cardiac problems in southern Saskatchewan that other regions of this country have. And that's because of the work that's been done in this health district to support cardiac people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday we've got a new CAT scan, a spiral CAT scan. Over 40 or 20 . . . I believe over 40,000 people get CAT scans each and every year in the province. That means more services.

Mr. Speaker, I think that Regina and the people in southern Saskatchewan have the state of the art technology in facilities and that means better health care to the people of this province.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. McLane:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask the minister one more time if you're planning on releasing this report today along with your waiting-list report?

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, even if the Premier in his address to this Chamber admitted his government's failed in its attempts in health care reform. And I ask the Premier today, considering he doesn't trust the minister to handle all the tough questions, if he would just take over the health care portfolio and straighten this whole mess out?

**Hon. Mr. Romanow:** — Mr. Speaker, I think I've heard some rather humorous questions but this one really goes a long way in taking the prize award.

I tell the hon. Liberal member, a member who's party federally cut back \$6 billion in health care since 1995 — \$6 billion. And may I say when the premiers met in Saskatoon, I had the privilege and the honour of chairing that meeting, and the headlines came out, premiers make health care top issue, that's what we said.

You know what your leader said — your leader said you sold

out. You know what the member from Kindersley said, he said, "Romanow traded off highways for health care to accommodate other premiers, namely Lucien Bouchard." The member from Kindersley said, "we've said health care is a priority, we've never said it was a number one priority." And that's exactly what the Liberals have said too. It was not the number one priority when we got the money for health care, today it's the number one priority.

People in Saskatchewan will never trust any Liberal or any Conservative at any time with the care and control of the health care system in the province of Saskatchewan.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

#### Plains Health Centre Closure Costs

**Mr. Boyd:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question this afternoon is for the Premier. Mr. Premier, you heard the people of Saskatchewan. You promised to improve health care and then you follow up by closing hospitals.

It hurts people when you promise no beds will be closed in Regina and then you follow up by closing 34 beds at the Pasqua Hospital and an additional 30 more beds at the Regina General. It hurts taxpayers and it hurts other health districts when you spend \$40 million more than you budgeted to close the Plains hospital. Even though the Finance minister said it's on time and on budget, on time and on budget — 50 times he said it.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, the Saskatchewan Party tried to call a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to investigate the \$40 million cost overrun but the NDP boycotted the meeting.

Mr. Premier, what are you hiding? The people of Saskatchewan deserve the truth. Will you support a full investigation by the Provincial Auditor of the \$40 million cost overrun at the Plains hospital for presentation to the legislature before the next provincial election?

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, here we go once again with good old Tory math. It's not 64 hospital beds that have been closed — closed 34 at the Regina General. I think there's 29. So they can't even get those numbers right.

Now, Mr. Speaker, these are the guys, there are the guys that say that they are going to increase the health spending by inflation. Well, Mr. Speaker, let's look at the facts. In 1996-97, we increased health spending by 4.1 per cent. That's twice the rate of inflation. The next year, 4.3 per cent, three times the rate of inflation. This year, 6.7 points again, three times the rate of inflation.

We've been investing, we've been investing, Mr. Speaker, in health care in this province. We haven't been freezing it.

And, Mr. Speaker, as a result of that we have over 800,000 days of in-patient care in our hospital beds. We have over 650,000 emergency room visits and over 4.6 million visits to doctors and we've got over 925,000 visits to specialists. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that's an awfully good record.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I'd like to rise to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

**The Speaker:** — The hon. member for Saltcoats wishes to introduce a motion under rule 46 of urgent and pressing necessity. I'll ask the hon. member, very briefly state the reason why he wishes to bring this matter to the attention of the House to set aside normal course of business, and to very briefly advise the House of the nature of the motion he wishes to introduce.

#### MOTION UNDER RULE 46

##### West Coast Grain Handlers Dispute

**Mr. Bjornerud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my emergency debate would be on the situation at the west coast with the grain handlers' labour dispute involving Public Service Alliance of Canada which has shut down grain shipments on the west coast for the fifth or sixth time in the last number of weeks. Various other unions now are starting to honour the picket line and it's shutting the total grain movement down on the west coast.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's of urgent need that we discuss this now and urge the federal government. The motion reads, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member for Moosomin:

That this Assembly urge the federal government to immediately legislate an end to the labour dispute affecting grain shipments at the west coast ports and to ensure that farmers do not incur demurrage charges for any late shipments caused by this dispute.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

Leave not granted.

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

##### SPECIAL ORDER

##### ADJOURNED DEBATES

##### ADDRESS IN REPLY

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

**Mr. Renaud:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a short opportunity yesterday . . . my speech in regards to support of this government's road map for this session, the fourth sitting of the twenty-third legislature, and it's my privilege to continue today.

I want to again thank the mover of the speech, the member from Redberry and the seconder, the member from Battleford-Cut Knife.

I want to say again too that I sought the nomination in Carrot River Valley for a third term, Mr. Speaker, under the banner of the New Democratic Party for several reasons. On Friday, March 12, there was a large crowd at the hall in Crooked River, the Princess Hall — in Hudson Bay, pardon me — and it was an honour for me to accept their wishes and their vote of confidence at that nominating meeting, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the reasons that I sought the nomination were as follows — there were many but, you know, you kind of sit and contemplate after seven years in politics whether you should in fact seek that nomination again. And so you weigh the pros and the cons. And some of the reasons that I thought maybe I should do that was because I wanted to continue to work for and with great constituents in my constituency.

The second reason for wanting to seek the nomination under the New Democratic banner, Mr. Speaker, was a concern within myself that the Tories were trying to trick the electorate by hiding behind the Saskatchewan name. Could they succeed? A grave concern that I had.

And the third reason was because of the priorities and the direction and the leadership that this government has provided to the citizens of this province, and resulting in Saskatchewan being selected, Mr. Speaker, as the best province in the best country in the world to live and raise a family.

And I know I mentioned this yesterday but it was something I learned from you, Mr. Speaker, or got the information from one of your presentations at a school in my constituency. I believe it was at the White Fox School. Just everyone should sit back and consider for a moment that there are about 6 billion people in the world. And there are several countries and there are several provinces and there are several states and there are several continents and you know how big the world is. And Saskatchewan — 1 million people — selected for that honour, Mr. Speaker. That is quite an achievement and one that we should be very proud of.

(1430)

The first reason, as I mentioned earlier, to seek the nomination was because of the great constituency that I represent and the people in that constituency. People from White Fox and Nipawin and Codette and Carrot River. Two First Nations in the constituency of Carrot River, Mr. Speaker — Red Earth and Shoal Lake. Communities of Arborfield and Crooked River and Peesane and Prairie River and Hudson Bay and Chelan and Bjorndale and Greenwater provincial park. Beautiful park.

And I know I've missed some, Mr. Speaker, and I also know that many of you have visited there. Many of you would probably like to live there. And you know, I think everyone knows what I speak about — the beauty of that constituency and the great hospitality and the great people in that area. That's why I want to represent that constituency, Mr. Speaker. That's number one reason.

And my job is to try and help those constituents, my friends and neighbours, their ideas and concerns. I have help. I have an office in Hudson Bay and Cathy Ryan represents me in that office, and many people visit her and ask me to help them with

their ideas or concerns.

And an office in Nipawin, Mr. Speaker, and Connie Black is the secretary there — or the minister's person. Very good public servants and very responsible to the great people of Carrot River Valley.

Now I want to deal . . . I am going to skip the second reason, you know, the second reason why I wanted to seek the nomination was, of course, my concern about the Tories sort of trying to trick the electorate. So I'm going to move to the third reason first, and I'll deal with that later.

The third reason, of course, is the direction and leadership and priorities that this government has provided to our citizens.

First I want to acknowledge that it is our citizens that are responsible for our successes, Mr. Speaker; there's no question about that. Government can only provide leadership. For jobs and working men and women, Mr. Speaker, a promise of 30,000 more jobs today than in 1991 when first elected — a goal that has been achieved.

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Now, all hon. members recognize this is Throne Speech debate, and I'm sure that in making remarks we'll want to put them on the record. And I assure all hon. members there is much time available to put the remarks in the record and I encourage you to do it that way.

**Mr. Renaud:** — I want to say again for jobs and working men and women, 30,000 more jobs today than in 1991 when we were first elected. And that goal was accomplished, Mr. Speaker, and we must do more.

I don't know if the members opposite who are chirping over there have ever opened up the *Leader-Post*, or the *Star-Phoenix*. They should. And they should look at the ads . . . the ads to hire people, you know — I don't know, what do they call them — want ads? Employment opportunities . . . employment opportunities.

If they would have looked at that newspaper in 1991, Mr. Speaker, when they were in power, they would have seen maybe a half a page of ads seeking employees. Today if they looked in that same newspaper, Mr. Speaker, there are page after page after page of ads seeking employees in the province of Saskatchewan — 478,000 people working in Saskatchewan today, more than ever before in the history of our province. Minimum wage improved; better labour laws. And of local interest to my constituents, Mr. Speaker, in the forest industry there are 9,000 direct and indirect jobs and \$600 million of economic activity in that one industry alone in this province. And by improving the way we utilize forests in a sustainable way with all stakeholders, this industry will provide many more jobs and economic activity.

In regards to social safety nets, Mr. Speaker, this government will continue with programs like the Child Benefit, employment supplement, and the family health benefit which helped reduce our social services caseloads in 1998 by 1,500, Mr. Speaker. Tremendous. Tremendous.

Changing unemployment insurance by the Liberals — of course

less to the working people, the people that need, and more to the surplus pot. And the downloading of the responsibility of the off-reserve Indian people in need to the province increased dramatically the number of people needing assistance.

Through forward thinking and cutting-edge programs, we are taking charge of this problem — not by giving one-way bus tickets to other provinces, Mr. Speaker, but in real programs, ending for some the need for dependency.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Renaud:** — This government, with the support and advice of our citizens, is working at making our communities safer, realizing that 99.9 per cent of our youth are good kids that work at the corner store, go to school, play on the football team or figure skate. We have to crack down on serious, habitual offenders. And in this session, Mr. Speaker, we will crack down on johns and help children get out of the sex trade. We will continue to support and improve early intervention for kids at risk and programs through health wellness that work with and support families.

We will, with other stakeholders continue to, slowly as we can afford it, rationalize and improve our transportation system. Mr. Speaker, 2.5 billion over 10 years — that's our commitment to roads in this province. My constituency has benefited through the winter tendering schedule. Highway No. 38, Highway No. 3, will receive more improvements. Still more needs to be done — I acknowledge that. And on this side of the House I'll acknowledge that. No. 55, Shoal Lake and Red Earth, the highway east of Carrot River certainly will need work as we can afford it. Highways 123 and 23 in the Bjorkdale area will also need work as we can afford it.

We'll also continue to twin, Mr. Speaker, Highways No. 1 and 16 — by ourselves if we have to. If the federal government will not, will not come with a national highways program, we will have to do it ourselves. You know we have a large land base and not many people — great place to live though. And we can't afford maybe things that other provinces have or we have to be a little slower in accomplishing some of those goals because of that. But we will get it done.

We will continue to stand up for changes to the Canadian transportation Act — that Act that I call the railway friendly Act — because our good friends in Ottawa . . . we will work to keep the rate cap so that our producers will pay a reasonable rate to ship their products to market. And we will change the railway's view — I hope someday — of the real meaning of competition.

We will continue to support the port of Churchill. And we will support short line alternatives. And we will continue to work for a strong and involved Canadian Wheat Board.

The importance of price pooling, quality and quantity assurances for our export customers are very, very important to the producers of this province. We will continue to try to convince the federal government that subsidies by the U.S. and Europe are driving the prices for our commodities down. And they have a responsibility.

It's not the Saskatchewan treasury that can compete with Washington or the European union — it's Ottawa that will have to take that cause. And we must continue to convince the federal Liberals that input costs are a concern — a real concern to our farming, our farmers.

The last word we got I believe from Ottawa was that well just let the farmers shop around — it will be okay. That's their concern about input costs. Well that's not enough, Mr. Speaker, and this government will continue to try to convince the federal Liberals that input costs are a concern and have to be dealt with.

The loss of the Crow benefit, Mr. Speaker, has cost farmers in this province \$320 million each and every year — twenty-five per cent of the input costs that farmers have.

Transportation, Mr. Speaker, transportation. Now the . . . the member opposite chirps up, well that's all you can talk about is loss of the Crow. I wish he would stay in touch with farmers, Mr. Speaker. If he talked to farmers they would tell him that, you know, only if we could have that benefit back we would have a chance to compete with the Americans and Europeans. But we don't have that any more and they have the support of the Tories in this House. I can't understand that, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, when you pull \$320 million out of a farmer's pocket, you pull it out of Saskatchewan businesses and you pull it out of the Saskatchewan economy. And the Tories support that. I still don't understand that.

And we must continue, Mr. Speaker, as much as we can provincially, to support agriculture through our safety net programs like crop insurance and NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account). We were able to enhance NISA just a few, a few . . . or a week or so ago, by announcing with the federal government \$85 million to top up the NISA accounts. And that's important. It's not much, but it'll help a little.

And I want to speak just a minute about the AIDA (Agriculture Insurance Disaster Assistance program) program. That's the new federal program that is supposed to be the end-all program for disaster relief, but of course it's not going to help many people.

And the opposition say, well why did you join it? Well it's pretty interesting when you have an opportunity to lose \$85 million to support farmers. It's kind of like the Premier said one day — you have to know when to hold them and you have to know when to fold them. And in this case we had to fold, and hopefully that program will help as many farmers as it can. It's not sufficient; we understand that. And we will have to watch the federal government and continue to push the federal government for a proper disaster relief program, Mr. Speaker.

Our Ag minister a few days ago also announced lower premiums and more products covered under crop insurance. Now that's something that the province can do. You know, we can help to a certain extent the agricultural sector and we will continue to do that. We must continue to promote value-added enterprises. The development of processing plants.

You know, it's better that we have fresh pack cuts rather than live hogs or a side of pork to ship to another country. Pasta

instead of durum, cosmetics and cereal in place of bulk oats. And you know as our farmers continue to diversify into potatoes and cabbage and carrots, coriander, beans, you name it, they're trying it, along with wheat and barley. We need that so that we will have a healthy rural community with schools and health care facilities and stores and recreation facilities. That's what we need to do.

New legislation, Mr. Speaker, announced in this Throne Speech to help the formation of new generation co-ops will help facilitate that very goal: healthy rural and urban communities in Saskatchewan.

(1445)

The Throne Speech talked about education as being one of our people's top priorities. And I want to say that we will continue to strengthen our partnership with teachers, school boards, parents, students, and all stakeholders in our education system. It is a tremendous system, right from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary and skills training. Graduates from universities and colleges, whether it be engineering, education, medicine, commerce, social work, to mention a few, are looked upon as some of the best educated when being considered for employment.

They are ready for the twenty-first century. A stronger emphasis to apprenticeship mentioned in our Throne Speech will continue to better prepare our youth and unemployed for the workplace. It will give them a step up on their competitors.

I had the privilege to meet with teachers' associations and school division boards in Hudson Bay and Nipawin recently, and they have stated very clearly that we must continue to recognize the changing classroom — a classroom that now takes a role in feeding our kids. Social and justice and special needs are all part of this new classroom.

The province has responded by announcing on Monday, March 15 in the Throne Speech, a Role of Schools Task Force to dialogue with teachers, parents, and all stakeholders and define new goals and roles for our schools and classrooms. Early intervention for at-risk kids was also flagged, Mr. Speaker, and a stronger pre-kindergarten program will help address that need.

It is very important that with the support and understanding of our constituents we continue to allow medicare to adjust to meet the needs of future generations. And today's users, in particular our seniors, with exploding changes and technology, drugs and drug costs, alternative medicines and the demographics of our province, we must be continuously changing how we deliver the services needed by our citizens. Some of the facilities we see today may change in appearance, but health care will always be the very best to meet our people's needs.

The opposition used scare tactics, Mr. Speaker, and we all heard them. Hudson Bay — a good example. You know, they're going to close that facility, they tell the people. Yes, this government's going to close that facility. Well, I want to read you, Mr. Speaker, the press release that was issued the day I was there to open the new facility. They did the very same to me in Hudson Bay as they did to the member from Redberry at

Hafford. The press release reads like this:

Associate Health Minister Judy Junor today announced the establishment of a primary health services site in Hudson Bay in the Pasquia Health District. The most significant difference Hudson Bay and area residents will notice will be the addition of a primary care nurse who will complement the team-based approach to health service delivery. The health team will focus on early intervention, prevention, and the health promotion . . .

I'm going to stop there just for a minute and make sure I have the attention of the members opposite, so that they will learn from this.

. . . The health team will focus on early intervention, prevention, and health promotion, as well as treatment and ongoing follow-up with patients.

This primary health service site is an excellent example of how, through co-operation and a community approach to health care, we can make our province's health system better serve our residents, Junor said.

The primary care nurse with advanced clinical training will, under the medical supervision of the local physicians, be able to treat minor illnesses and stable chronic conditions. This will mean that the residents may see the nurse instead of, or in addition to, the physicians.

In addition to primary care nurse, the health team includes . . .

Now listen to this:

. . . the health team includes physicians, public health, mental health, the Hudson Bay and District Assessment and Resource centre, home care, visiting health professionals, and workers from other community services.

And this is what the doctor says, and I quote:

"We look forward to the addition of an advanced clinical nurse to our existing team," Hudson Bay physician Dr. Don Gelhorn said.

Junor congratulated the Pasquia Health District, staff and the Hudson Bay physicians for their pioneering work in providing Hudson Bay and area residents with this team-based approach to health services.

"We believe that these changes will enhance our ability to offer a broader range of health services which will benefit our patients," Hudson Bay physician, Dr. Larry Sandomirsky added. "We hope that these new arrangements will enhance our ability to recruit and retain physicians in Hudson Bay and area."

The Hudson Bay site is part of a provincial primary health services initiative introduced in 1997. Other primary sites have been established in Beechy, Kyle, and Hafford, and Saskatchewan Health is working with other health districts, physicians, and communities to establish

additional primary health services sites.

"We are pleased to support the addition of the primary services site to the range of services to be provided at the new Hudson Bay Health Care Facility," said Pasquia District Health Board Chairperson Carol Hayward. "We are putting the health needs of our residents front and centre by embarking on a community-based, teamwork approach to health service delivery."

Now I don't know if the people over there understand that. They continue to use scare tactics. They say we are closing facilities, you know. This is about more services. Primary health care service may include a dental service perhaps that will move . . . that will come to the site of the building or a chiropractic service coming to a community that does not have such a service today — that's what it's about. It's about enhancing services, not taking them away.

I want to talk a minute about the importance our citizens put on the ability of this government to, however difficult, keep the books balanced. This year will be the fifth consecutive year that the NDP have been able to accomplish this — not by ourselves. We may have played that leadership role as I explained earlier, but it was the Saskatchewan people themselves who said we need to do it, it is our people who tightened their belts, it is our people who made the sacrifices.

And in five short years, Mr. Speaker, we have paid over \$3 billion on a \$15 billion debt by using some of those surpluses and the good management of Crowns and CIC (Crown Investments Corporation) holdings. And at the same time we have been able to cut taxes as well — two points off the sales tax, two points off the income tax, and a portion of the debt reduction surtax — and at the same time enhance services.

We have to remember that the NDP had to backfill 100 per cent of the Liberal cuts to health care and 93 per cent of the Liberal cuts to education plus enhance our own spending in priority areas like health, education, and highways.

And as long as we have an NDP government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there will be a surplus because we have a balanced budget law in Saskatchewan. And the surpluses will be used in a balanced approach: one-third to continue to pay down the debt, one-third to continue to reduce taxes, and one-third to continue to enhance services in priority areas.

Have we accomplished Utopia? Absolutely not. Is there more to do? For sure. Have we made mistakes? You bet.

But let's look at the alternative. When I was preparing for today I was thinking, you know, if we went back to 1991 and thought for a minute what it would be like if we would have left the other administration, the people across, in power, what would we be like in Saskatchewan today? It's a scary thought.

And you know, I heard Mr. Hermanson on television last night stating that the record of this government is deplorable. And if we step back to 1991 and look from whence we began, from where we came from to today — \$3 billion paid on our debt, lower taxes, service enhancements — I can't understand where he gets his point of view. And as I mentioned earlier, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, it would be a sad day if we would have not changed the government in 1991.

Finally, friends, the second reason why I sought the support of my party at our recent nominating meeting was that we must tell the people about the Tories and their stories, their scare tactics, their propaganda, and their misplaced priorities. I want to be here, Mr. Speaker, to warn our people about the dangers of placing a growing but fragile economy in the hands of the same old it-could-be-better, Tories.

You know if you open the Regina phone book you will find the Tories listed under the Progressive Conservative Party and you will find the Saskatchewan Party listed under the Saskatchewan Party. The strange thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that they have the same address. They have the very same address.

And you know, someone once told me, and I think our Minister of Health said it today in question period, if it still quacks like a duck and if it looks like a duck and if it waddles like a duck, it's likely still a duck. And if it has the same address, for sure it's the same duck.

I know that most of you in this House will not recognize this name — I don't think you will — Grant Schmidt. I don't think anyone will maybe recognize that name. But I do know that he advertises in the Melville newspaper as president of the Saskatchewan Party Association for candidates; that he's looking for honest, hardworking candidates in the name of the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . They are the same old Tories. They are.

And I want to tell people again about Tommy Douglas's story. You know he had the story about the white cats and the black cats and they each took their turn at governing. And then finally the people got smart and elected the mice.

But I wonder if Tommy was here today what he would say with these . . . Like, the white cats are still here but the black cats have sort of . . . And I think what you would see is a little black and a little white with lots of kitty litter.

You know the Tories conducted a poll to prove to the people that they are very popular in rural Saskatchewan. And their poll included 67 per cent males, 33 per cent females; about 45 per cent was conducted in the southeast of our province and about 45 per cent in the southwest, about 4 per cent in the northeast, where I'm from, and about 6 per cent in the northwest.

This is what the Tories believe, Mr. Speaker, is that a male in the South represents the views of everyone in rural Saskatchewan. Maybe yes, but I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

And what about our highways and the recent worst highway contest, Mr. Speaker. I will join people like Dwain Drew of Carrot River and remind the people who really created the pothole in the first place — the members opposite.

And of course I want to be there, Mr. Speaker, I want to be here warning our citizens of the intended sell-off of our Crown corporations. If the Tories are elected, this is what they say — now listen very carefully — the privatization of Crown corporations where it is in the public interest to do so. Well, you

know for a Tory, Mr. Speaker, it is always in the public interest to sell off a Crown corporation.

And health care, Mr. Speaker. The promise of Texas-style audits and for-profit health care like the U.S. (United States) where over 40 million people have no health care insurance at all — is this what we want?

You know, the Tories criticize the NDP in regards to health care but they have no plan, absolutely no plan of their own, except to scare people and to freeze for five years the funding for health care. Well that's interesting. Inflation alone will mean drastic cuts under a Tory government.

And their platform, "The Way Up" — I had a copy of it but I didn't bring it — "The Way Up" it's called. It's a very good selection of a name. At least they realize they once took us to the bottom, Mr. Speaker.

In closing, friends, together we have come a long way. We still have plenty to do and that is why I will be supporting our Throne Speech, our direction for this session, Mr. Speaker, our road map for the fourth session of the twenty-third legislature.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

(1500)

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's indeed a great pleasure to be back for the fourth session of this Assembly. It's great to be back to welcome you and your colleagues to this Assembly. And it's also great to have the opportunity to reply to this Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time in my constituency two communities have been added to the legislative channel broadcasts, and at this time I would like to welcome them and trust that a number of people are indeed finding the debates very useful and interesting — the communities are Tisdale and Kinistino. I think that it'll be a welcome addition to the services provided by Mr. Ward and his colleagues and I know that it is always very interesting.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne reminded me of a story I heard recently and I would like to pass it on because I think there are some parallels that are worth mentioning. The story is about an ocean voyage from across the Atlantic, and as a matter of course, the captain — and the first officer, the first mate, from time to time — always had to do a daily log of things such as the ship's position, what time of the day it was, how fast they were going, relevant items of interest and importance to the ship.

In one particular occasion, the first mate, who was known not ever to indulge in having more than a very, very, very tiny bit of rum on occasion accidentally had too much rum. And at the end of the day, the captain made the note in the log about the time and the place and the distance and the position, and he also made a note that said the first mate was drunk today.

The first mate when he saw the note in the log protested and pleaded with the captain to have him remove that entry into the log. He said, I've never done this before and it is only on one occasion; I don't know what happened. And this is going to potentially have an impact on how people and potential employers think of me. Would you please remove it from the log? And the captain was very, very staunch and he said no, it's a fact and into the log it will stay.

Well some days later it was the first mate's time to be the person in charge of the bridge and he completed all his duties faithfully. And at the end of the day he made his notations in the log and he noted the time and the date and the location and the speed and all the relevant information. And he added this further thing. It said: the captain was sober today.

The captain protested viciously. He said, what are you doing? I've never ever, ever, ever been drunk on the job and this implies that this was the first day that I was sober. And the first mate said it's a fact and into the log it will stay.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, when I heard the Speech from the Throne I thought isn't that just about the way things are because the speech is more hyperbole and more misrepresentation of supposed facts than reality. And I think when it stands the test of scrutiny it is not going to stand very well at all. And so the Speech from the Throne does indeed deserve some careful scrutiny and I will return to that general theme a bit later.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about some issues and, first of all, issues that are important to people in my constituency. The Melfort-Tisdale constituency over the years has been very blessed by mother nature and by the industry and dedication and work of the people that live there. Over the years, we've built a very diverse and strong economy largely based on agriculture, but beginning to see value added and further diversification of our economy and very much of a move into areas such as tourism, ecotourism, game farming, and things of that nature.

But the bottom line is for our constituency the most important commodity, the most important human endeavour is still based around agriculture.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1998 in our constituency, by and large, we had a very bountiful harvest. We had good crops. We had new and diverse crops, and by and large they turned out very, very well for the farmers in our constituency.

The harvest was very favourable. I've had farm friends tell me that in their whole memory of farming this was the most favourable harvest season that they've ever had. The weather was such that the actual harvesting process went very easy. There were people that said they didn't even burn one single belt in the whole process and that was a welcome relief from a lot of years where that wasn't necessarily the case. So the harvest was very good.

And really, you know, Mr. Speaker, a member opposite said this was his worst harvest. Well of course he doesn't live in Melfort-Tisdale constituency, the centre of God's blessing to the universe in terms of the harvest this year. And hopefully, you will see your way clear to visit our constituency and

perhaps even look at moving your farm after the election. You'll have a lot of freedom on your hands.

So, Mr. Speaker, the area is very, very bountiful in that respect. And last fall the farmers in my area were feeling very grateful. They saw with concern some of the other areas of the province where drought had really done a very devastating impact on the crop on the west side particularly.

There were areas in the southeast that had a great deal of difficulty in terms of the challenges of harvest. And when I went around last fall talking to farmers in my constituency, by and large, they were very, very grateful and relieved that that was spared them in this harvest season.

And so there was not a great deal of concern expressed after the harvest last year, it was mostly gratitude. And I think that that was an appropriate sentiment in our area.

But you know over the winter things have been changing. And I noticed when I talked to the business community already last fall in Melfort they were sensing that the farm community was starting to be much more cautious with their spending, and in our communities that that is the cornerstone of what moves the economy.

And so while there was not a great deal of concern expressed, the business community could almost immediately sense a tightening up of the spending habits or traditions of their rural customers. It started to impact pretty noticeably early in the fall last year and extended into the winter season.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the spring has now advanced and people have started to take stock and complete their year-end financial statements and start looking at what their input costs were going to be into the 1999 crop year, concern has accelerated.

And as well, Mr. Speaker, of course, there are a number of hog operations in our constituency as well and they went through a very devastating cost-price squeeze which they're only beginning to see their way out of. So for some segments, it has been very difficult.

But I notice a very dramatic change in what's happening to people right now. Sure there are those farm organizations and farm entities, families that are pretty well established and are not into immediate concern, in terms of cash flow and cash crisis. But there are a great many people as well that are looking forward to the 1999 crop year and are realizing that the margins are going to be extremely small, that the margins are going to be extremely tight, and that they have to be very careful about their cropping decisions this spring.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think that that is appropriate in a general sense as well. But really what changed people's attitude, I think, in my area is the way this whole negotiation about a long-term aid package and a response to the subsidy war that was occurring off our shores was being conducted.

They were absolutely horrified when they realized that our government was going to stand back instead of going to the table and negotiating and participating right upfront with the whole process. They realized that we were going to stand back

and throw stones. And as a result what happened? What we ended up was a program that is totally unacceptable to people right across this province.

And, you know, the irony of it all is, is because of the fact that in our area we had some pretty good crops over the last three years and some pretty good prices, it is at least theoretically possible that the 70 per cent rule that'll apply in this aid package will at least be based on a three-year average that amounts to something. And potentially farmers in my area that need it are potentially at least going to have some benefit out of the program.

But in my area they sit and they look at the guys on the other side of the province and they say, 70 per cent of nothing is still nothing. How in the world can the people who've had difficult harvests from drought or other issues, of frost, etc., how are they going to benefit out of this issue?

And what the Saskatchewan opposition has been talking about — the Saskatchewan Party opposition — where we should've had a per acre based aid program was the only thing that made sense because it was fair to everybody. It would've put cash in everybody's hand in time for the spring seeding. And what we have now is a bureaucratic mess that's going to result in a whole bunch of forms, a whole bunch of complicated calculations being made and very little is going to be going into the hands of those that need it most. So they were really, really concerned about what happened in that area.

And, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, my colleague from Carrot River Valley was talking about how wonderful their government has been over this whole process of commitment to the farmers. Well people in my area and people right across this province still remember that this NDP government were the ones who unilaterally not only changed the rules of this House, but retroactively took the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program away from farmers that was designed to protect them in exactly this emergency that's coming forward. And it resulted in \$200 million going back into the provincial government and almost 300 million being returned to the feds.

So when we talk about who has taken away a support program from the farmers of this province, this government has to bear their responsibility because the farmers of this province know indeed who took it from them and will remember it when the election comes forward, I am quite confident.

Mr. Speaker, the other area that I want to talk about — one of two more areas in my constituency — is the whole area of health care. And while, Mr. Speaker, we have had very dramatic impacts by this health program of the NDP government, by and large, our people have bit the results and are now faced with the downsized services that have resulted out of this government's handling of the health care issue.

I have to, however, give one area of credit that I think credit is due and that is the fact that in the whole northeast, three health districts, Mr. Speaker, three health districts worked together on a joint project to supply renal dialysis in Tisdale which was central to the three districts. And I said last year, and I'll say again this year, that I think that that has been a positive program and the government should be recognized and congratulated for



that initiative.

The reality is, is that the capacity of this unit has been established and it has been initially established at a 50 per cent capacity. And the discussions that went on with the department were such that when need could be demonstrated to have a need beyond that 50 per cent capacity that it would be increased. And, Mr. Speaker, I say on the public record now is that that need has been increased, and the need has been demonstrated, and there is application to have the capacity of the unit increased as well to 100 per cent of capacity to supply the ever-increasing identified people who would benefit from this service in the northeast. And I look forward to the government looking positively on that proposal for increased access to the facility in Tisdale.

The other area that is of a concern in health care is when you sit down and you have a visit and a cup of coffee with the front-line workers. And it doesn't matter really if it's people with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) or SGEU (Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union) or SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses), the nurses; it doesn't matter what their jobs are in the health district, if they work with clients in senior citizens' homes or if they provide . . . of the support staff that provides meals and cleaning services. It doesn't matter if your front-line nurse is working in the public health department or if you're working in acute care. It really doesn't matter who you talk to, what their political background may be — because it really doesn't matter — every single person is concerned about what's going on in health care.

Every single one of them have a story about how the system is falling apart, how morale is diminishing to a point where they don't want to come to work in the morning. How they're worried about how that low morale and concern is being passed on to the clients, and how they are feeling increasingly burnt-out and frustrated about their ability to provide the services that they know that their clients deserve.

And Mr. Speaker, I think that in the last negotiations where the union leadership were recommending the acceptance of the CUPE contract and it was rejected by a 56 per cent vote by the membership, indicates that level of frustration and concern and how high it is because the people were expressing not only initially their willingness to go out on strike with great concern about the impact it would have on their clients who've become their friends, but a recognition of the fact that these people have their backs to the wall. The frustration has built to the stage where burnout is happening, and they know we can't go on like this.

And so, Mr. Speaker, before this government breaks an arm patting itself on the back, it better make sure it deals with the front-line workers who have to care to that broken arm and deal with the realities. And unfortunately this government keeps its head in the sand and isn't willing to look at if indeed the money we're spending — it's going to be probably over \$1.8 billion this year after this budget — if that money is being well spent.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the health care component of the provincial budget, it's going to probably be very close to 40 per cent of the total expenditure. I think it was 38 per cent in the last fiscal year. That's a huge commitment by the people of this

province to health care. It's a huge commitment.

And I think the time has come, in fact I know the time has come, the health workers that I've been visiting with in my constituency know the time has come, where we have to look at how we're spending that money to make sure it's going where it's really needed most. That's critical. I think any family, any household, any business, that has a single expenditure that amounts to 40 per cent of your income has to look at that on an ongoing basis with a very clear look to making sure that the money is being well spent.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know the health care workers in my constituency want to know that that is happening. They want to know that we have the administration level we need and not way more than we need. They want to know that the way we're organizing home care and long-term care and acute care is meeting the needs in an efficient way.

You know, there's so many stories that are told anecdotally about wastes that happen in the system. Everywhere you go, you hear these stories. Well if you add them all up they're probably going to add to a lot of money that's being wasted in the system and we simply have to look at it and say, are we getting the best value we can for the dollars we're spending.

Because this province's ability to infinitely increase the health care budget as a percentage of the total will diminish. One day we're going to have to do accounting of the stewardship of the 40 per cent of the budget that we're spending on health care and this government has been remiss in not doing it long before now.

Mr. Speaker, the other area that people are concerned about — and I have people that call me on a regular basis — is the great concern they have for having to leave our community that has some health care, acute care facilities and have to go to Prince Albert or Saskatoon primarily for acute care and what they feel like when they get there.

You know, every day you hear stories of people who feel that they're getting the minimum of service and then get the bum's rush to get out of the place so that they can have someone else moving into the facility. They tell stories of how cold and impersonal the care is in many of these institutions, not because people don't care but because they're simply overworked and understaffed and the front line workers don't have the resources that they need in order to do the job properly.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we simply have to look at how the money is being spent. Is it meeting the needs of Saskatchewan people and providing the best health system that we can have for our people? Are there areas of improvement where we can be more effective and more precise in the way we're spending our resources so that the issues that are facing the front line people who provide an incredible service with increased compassion and dedication every day are going to have the resources that they need to meet the needs of health care people?

Mr. Speaker, another area of concern, and also an area where I have to give some accolades to one of the Crowns, is in the area of telephones. Mr. Speaker, as you're aware, when I first came into the House, one of the issues that I raised in the House were

the issue of regional telephones. And I presented a private members' Bill the very first time, my first private members' Bill will go on record as being in regard to the issue of regional telephones.

And I have had ample opportunities to talk to the managers and the people at SaskTel about this issue, and I was pleased to see a year ago where SaskTel started taking steps to providing for regional telephone exchanges in this province. And I congratulate them for that and I thank them for listening to the concerns that were being expressed in rural Saskatchewan.

And in my constituency there has been progress made in terms of the issues that were raised, and we've had some regionalization of the exchanges to make them better for Saskatchewan people. And when SaskTel came around through the province, particularly in my neck of the woods, we sat down with them as well and said this is a good first step but there's more that needs to be done. We need to address the issue of how people can call people in the neighbouring exchange or from rural Saskatchewan to urban Saskatchewan, and indeed maybe look at the issue even beyond those borders.

And again I have to say that I thank them for listening to us because I think the bundling program that they've come up with in terms of putting together services in a pretty cost-effective way have been again a good first step in terms of dealing with the issue of people communicating with each other.

And you know the good positive benefit out of this, I'm led to believe, is SaskTel is not losing revenue through this process. Indeed the utilization of long distance calls are going up so that . . . I know my granddaughter in Calgary phones me much more often and gets on the phone and says Papa, I miss you. And that's hard for me to hear, but I'm glad at least these bundling and these long-distance plans make it affordable for our children and grandchildren to call us and for we to call them much more.

And so I think, Mr. Speaker, this program and this idea that I first proposed three years ago has resulted in much better service and much more community happening within families and within communities than what we ever realized when we first looked at it strictly as a cost issue. And so I certainly give SaskTel credit for the initiatives they've taken, and I encourage them to look beyond that to do a cost analysis as well as to how it would work if we increase some of these services better.

An area where there is some concern is the area of cellular service, and perhaps cellular is an area where regionalization of services has to be looked at as well. I've had a number of concerns expressed to me by the town of Tisdale and the Tisdale Chamber of Commerce that indicate that while there is cellular service in Tisdale, because the Tisdale cellular tower is so much lower and of a weaker energy output apparently than Nipawin or Melfort, the service in terms of the long distance from Tisdale is very, very small. The footprint is very small.

And so for people that are not very far out of Tisdale if they want to phone into their community with their cellular phone, they're immediately on long-distance coverage and the whole issue of the regionalization that has occurred on the land lines with SaskTel in terms of the neighbouring exchanges, I think

has to be looked at in cellular service as well. And perhaps the regional concept could be applied to cellular service as well to address those kinds of issues because I don't think it's viable to build a tower in Melfort or in Tisdale another hundred feet taller so it all works out the same. That seems to be very wasteful. But I do think the issue of providing reasonable local service even on a cellular network is something that SaskTel has to look at, and I encourage them to do that.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues that face not only my constituency but the province as well. People in our area are not immune even though the agricultural industry has been relatively successful to the pain that is in people's minds about social services and welfare and the inability to find work. There's pain in our communities about recognizing that so many of our young people are leaving our neighbourhoods because there isn't the opportunities that they need for meaningful employment.

There's concern by some of our local employers who see that jobs and employees are being lured away from rural Saskatchewan into urban Saskatchewan and then into neighbouring provinces for a whole lot of issues. And I think, Mr. Speaker, it's long past due when this province has to seriously look at the depopulation of rural Saskatchewan and what the impact it's going to have on our delivery of services and the impact on families and jobs into the future.

And I haven't seen this happening except in a haphazard knee-jerk way that seems to imply that the government doesn't have a plan. And after eight years in charge of the affairs of this province, it's time that they did indeed make a plan. But I fear it's much too late for that. And instead of them making a plan, the people are going to ask someone else to do it.

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to hear the Speech from the Throne talk about jobs. And it was also interesting to hear the member from Carrot River Valley quote some statistics, because I would like to follow that up.

In the Speech from the Throne when they talk about jobs and growth, the quote was, and I will quote from the Speech from the Throne. It says, "Together we have created 30,000 jobs. We will do more."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that that is a number that has to be challenged. Because Statistics Canada also quoted, and the member opposite from Carrot River Valley quoted again this afternoon, that in 1998 there were 478,600 jobs, working people in this province. And I think that that is fine. And the same Statistics Canada also said that in 1991 when this government took office, there were 458,000 jobs.

Well my math says if you subtract one from the other it's 20,600 jobs that were created, not 30,000. And again we see an example of where this government is putting into the log, if you like, information that is factually incorrect.

And I would like very much to make sure it's on the record that the number as agreed to from StatsCanada is 20,600 jobs — 10,000 or 9,400 jobs less than you said in the Speech from the Throne you created; 9,400 jobs less than you promised to create. About two-thirds of the promise delivered. And so again

you fall short and the people of this province deserve to know it.

**An Hon. Member:** — Even the Lieutenant Governor couldn't say it.

**Mr. Gantefer:** — Mr. Speaker, my colleague says it's even true, even the Lieutenant Governor was unable to say the numbers when he was reading the speech. And so, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at that.

The second issue that I think I want to talk about on a provincial basis is the whole issue of taxes. There's a reason why we're falling behind in our job creation. There's a very simple reason why that's happening. The reason is, is that the taxes are too high in this province. You know we've said for some time that it is unacceptable that Saskatchewan should have the second highest taxes in Canada. And it is unacceptable.

But you know what makes it worse, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is when you look on the bigger scale, and of the G7 countries Canada has the highest level of taxes of the G7. And so here we are in good old Saskatchewan in the country with the highest taxes among the Group of Seven nations of the world, with the highest taxes, here we are in good old Saskatchewan with the second highest taxes in Canada.

And what makes it even worse than that is we're next to the province that has the lowest. And so the comparison is very immediate and very stark when we look at the differences between our two provinces.

And one of the things that were ignored in this Speech from the Throne was the whole issue of taxes. You know, Mr. Lloyd Boutilier, president of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce made comment on Tuesday, March 16, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*. And he said, "We didn't hear anything on taxes today. We need further tax cuts in this province to retain our young people who are graduating in the province and those people who are retiring. We're seeing more and more people leaving Saskatchewan."

And that's a tragedy, Mr. Speaker, because they are given no options, there's no opportunity for them. And this Speech from the Throne was absolutely mute on the point of tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, as well, Mr. Richard Truscott, the provincial director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said that there were few hints if we could expect tax relief in the budget coming on March 26. "Tax relief and tax reform must be the top two priorities of this government in the upcoming budget."

And so all of a sudden you see two prominent individuals representing two major organizations in this province who are saying they are very, very concerned about what's going on.

(1530)

And you know, Mr. Speaker, it would be bad enough if everything was left alone. It would be bad enough with the fact that in Saskatchewan our people are paying . . . an average Alberta family, for example, right now will pocket about \$9,000 more each year in take-home pay than the average

Saskatchewan family. That's bad enough, Mr. Speaker.

A Manitoba family will pocket about \$4,400 more than the average Saskatchewan family in taxes. That's bad enough.

But you know what's even going to be worse is when you get to the next few years and Stockwell Day, the Finance minister for the province of Alberta, really sort of put a shot across the bow probably of all Canadian governments and said he is going to fundamentally change the way taxes are collected in Alberta in the Year 2002.

And he said, you know, what we really are in a situation, we're going to decouple the provincial income tax as a percentage of federal to what they're going to do is have 11 per cent flat tax. And what they're going to do in order to take care of other issues is deal with the low-income people by removing some 70,000 taxpayers from the Alberta tax roll altogether while they're doing this.

And so, Mr. Speaker, if we think we've got a competitive disadvantage right now, if nothing is done it's going to get tremendously worse in three short years. You know, I quote from Mr. Bruce Johnstone in the Saturday *Leader-Post*, March 13. And he says, and I quote:

The Alberta Advantage just got a whole lot bigger.

Alberta Treasurer Stockwell Day's trail-blazing budget puts our western neighbour several more light-years ahead of us in terms of taxes, debt load and fiscal flexibility.

Even without any major tax cuts this year, Alberta taxpayers will pay hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of dollars less in taxes than Saskatchewan residents earning the same income.

And he goes on to list the whole example of different tax brackets and income brackets of how major this impact is going to be. And he sums up by saying this, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

In next week's budget, Cline will undoubtedly have a few modest goodies for taxpayers. But, if you're looking for real tax relief, you're going to (have to) go west to find it.

And, Mr. Speaker, that troubles me a great deal because if we can't retain our young people, if we can't retain them and show them that it is in their advantage to build their careers in this province and to raise their families in this province, who's going to be left?

Is the tax burden going to be increasingly imposed on fewer and fewer taxpayers? How in the world can we carry that burden and still have balanced budgets and provide the services that our people need? How are we going to do that? Every government, including Alberta, in the '80s ran deficits; every single government in this province, in this country. And quite simply to say that this province is the only one with debt is irresponsible. They all had debt. But what they did is take a different approach as to how they would solve it. They said they were going to build the economy. They were going to grow the economy. They were going to encourage people to invest in their economy and to move it forward — that's what they did.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a huge issue that this province has to deal with, and in this Speech from the Throne this government has completely ignored it. And we do it at our peril. The member from Carrot River Valley said we reduced sales tax by 2 per cent — and he's right — but they're also the guys that increased it 2 per cent. And so you know what happens in Saskatchewan, only if we end up right where we started from, we consider that progress. That's just nonsense.

And the people of this province know it. Business leaders know it. Taxpayers' federation know it. The seniors who are leaving this province to live elsewhere know it. Our young people who are graduating from university and going elsewhere for jobs know it. People are fed up, Mr. Speaker, and they're looking to this government for some direction. And they're getting nothing but complaints.

They're getting nothing but trying to fight an election that was eight years ago. Mr. Speaker, I want to fight the 1999 election. I want to go to the polls right now, but I doubt if this government has the courage to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope . . . I very much support the amendment by my colleague from Canora-Pelly that says let's go to the polls right now, let's go to the people of Saskatchewan, let's do that now. I'll be voting for that amendment, Mr. Speaker, and I'll be voting against acceptance of the Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Murray:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's always a real pleasure to be involved in the Throne Speech debate. And I must say that my heart always beats a little faster but I'm very happy to be here, and I'm very happy to have an opportunity to say a few words.

I want to thank you for your diligence to your duties as Deputy Speaker. And I'd also like to say a few words to Mr. Speaker, and commend him on his continuing wise counsel, his patience, and his wisdom in dealing with this House. I'd also like to thank him for the work that he does in his outreach programs.

I know that many of us have been involved in them. He's come to our schools, and he's had the schools here in the Chamber. And the presentation he does is just excellent and it's something I wish that everyone could see because it gives you a new respect for the whole parliamentary system. And, Mr. Speaker, more than anyone, has a tremendous respect for the parliamentary system.

I want to welcome back all my colleagues on both sides of the House. It's good to see you and it's nice to be here. I want to make a special mention of welcome to the member from Saskatoon Eastview who is here in her first session, and has already made a valuable contribution to the work of this government.

I also want to say a special welcome to the member from Athabasca, who showed all of us how to do the honourable thing.

I'd like to welcome the new pages as well. We hope that you

will enjoy your time here in the session. And it goes without saying that the work you do is invaluable to us and we really appreciate your energy and your commitment to this House.

I also want to say good luck and best wishes to two former colleagues and friends, Robert Mitchell and Ed Tchorzewski. It seems strange to be able to actually say their names in the legislature. Both of them have moved on to other challenges. They continue to be valued friends. And in their time with this government, they've made huge contributions and were certainly part of many of the defining moments of this government. And all of us miss them and I know we all wish them well.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Murray:** — And of course, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't be involved in this debate without making special congratulatory remarks to the colleague who moved the Speech from the Throne, the member from Redberry Lake; and to the member from Battleford-Cut Knife who was the seconder.

The speeches were very eloquent, and they were passionate, and they were full of wisdom, and a real inspiration. And I certainly enjoyed and appreciated their comments very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Murray:** — It's a tremendous honour to be asked to be the first to speak and they both did an exemplary job and we're very proud of them. Thank you.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I also want to pay my respects to the people in the Regina Qu'Appelle Valley constituency, which is my constituency. I want to thank them for the trust that they have placed in me and tell them how honoured I always feel to represent them.

I've talked about the constituency many times in past debates, and I just want to say again that physically it's a very beautiful constituency, having the Qu'Appelle Valley right in the middle of it as it has, and also glorious wheat fields and fine communities like northwest Regina and Lumsden and Grand Coulee.

As well, there's such an intense variety of people in that constituency doing so many interesting and wonderful things. I mean, we have artists and musicians; we have teachers and other professional people; doctors, lawyers, radio personalities, television personalities. It's really a very diverse constituency, and it's always very pleasant for me to spend time there.

So I thank them for keeping in touch with me and for welcoming me into their homes and their businesses and their schools. And I just want them to know that I never tire of being their MLA, and I continue to thank them for their support.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Murray:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, in this debate on the Throne Speech — and a fine speech it was, I might say — I could talk about many things.

I could talk about keeping the promise to create meaningful jobs for today and tomorrow. Saskatchewan has made tremendous economic strides in recent years. In fact, our province has led the country in terms of economic growth over the past five years, posting either the best or second-best growth in those years. The result of our improved economic condition has been more jobs for Saskatchewan people.

There are plenty of new projects coming up in the province, Mr. Speaker, that will stimulate our economy even further and create more jobs. For example, the Research and Development Park in Regina will create 165 construction jobs, and tenants of the park expect to employ 300 people. Good news for Saskatchewan.

One other project I'll mention, the \$1.1 billion Pan Canadian CO<sub>2</sub> project in Weyburn will create 30,000 person-years of employment in the area.

Or, Mr. Speaker, I could talk about keeping the promise to provide quality education and training. A growing economy requires skilled, knowledgeable workers. We all know that by investing in our young people we will build the skills and academic excellence they need to fulfill their potential for satisfying and prosperous lives here in Saskatchewan.

I could mention and let you know something about the training and skills development. For instance, we are providing \$136 million for skills training and employment programs. We are delivering more training to more people for more jobs than ever before in our history.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Murray:** — This year nearly 23,000 people will have the opportunity to participate in training, education, and skills development programs through the Saskatchewan Training Strategy.

I could tell you about universities and that we're providing over \$200 million for our two Saskatchewan universities.

I could tell you about student aid, and say that we are increasing student aid for 2,200 students with children by raising the assistance limits to reflect today's costs. In fact, Saskatchewan Student Assistance Program is one of the best in Canada, and this past year we made it even better. More students are getting more financial assistance with considerably less debt as well as tax help when they go to repay their debt.

I'm always pleased, Mr. Speaker, to mention our investment in infrastructure and transportation. Our goal is to ensure that Saskatchewan families can count on a sustainable highway network with improved levels of service on high priority highways.

(1545)

A further priority will be to address the road infrastructure in the province and we are committed to a 10-year, \$2.5 billion highway program.

I could also share some Saskatchewan road facts with you. We

have 26,100 kilometres of provincial roads and highways to maintain and upgrade. We also have 158,900 kilometres of municipal roads. Our road system has 800 bridges and 12 major river crossings served by ferry operations.

Six per cent of our total road network carries 70 per cent of the total traffic. Saskatchewan has more kilometres of twinned highways per capita than any other province in Canada. But alas, Mr. Speaker, I also must mention this: that Canada is the only industrialized country that does not have a funded national highway program.

Something important to all of us, Mr. Speaker, is keeping the promise to reduce taxes for families and businesses. On the road to turning the province's finances around, we promised to reduce taxes on an affordable, sustainable basis and that's what we've been doing. Since we balanced the budget in '94-95, we've reduced taxes for families in every budget since. In 1997 we lowered the education and health tax from 9 per cent to 7 per cent leaving an additional \$180 million in taxpayers' pockets every year.

On July 1 of last year, the 2 per cent reduction in the provincial income tax rate which we announced in the 1998-99 budget came into effect. A \$55 million per year income tax reduction was introduced in 1995 and fully implemented in 1996.

Besides providing tax relief to families, we've also introduced a number of tax incentives to encourage jobs and economic growth. Targeted tax incentives introduced since 1992 included: 20 per cent cut in the income tax rate for small business; elimination of the sales tax on 1 800 and 1 888 telephone numbers; and a 7 per cent tax credit on new and taxable used equipment. Mr. Speaker, when we balanced the budget in 1994 we began a series of gradual tax cuts which are affordable, sustainable, and reasonable — and that's what we will continue to do.

Mr. Speaker, I could also talk at great lengths about our promise to preserve medicare. Our commitment, Mr. Speaker, to health is stronger today than ever. And that commitment includes increased funding to health districts to maintain and improve hospital and home care services. That commitment includes operating funding for diagnostic tools such as the new MRI in Regina and the CT (computerized tomography) scanner in Prince Albert. It also includes 25 new family physicians recruited to rural Saskatchewan in 1997 through a joint provincial Saskatchewan Medical Association rural practice establishment grant program.

Mr. Speaker, today we provide a wider range of health services than ever before including province-wide screening for breast cancer, treatment for people with eating disorders, new health and safety programs for farm families, in-home and renal dialysis for Saskatchewan residents, and specialized pediatric teams to transport children anywhere in Saskatchewan for specialty services.

Well I could talk about these issues, Mr. Speaker, for a long, long time because they're certainly very important and they're certainly worth discussing, but I know that many of my colleagues on this side of the House will again talk about the positive initiative that this government has outlined in the

Throne Speech.

But, Mr. Speaker, just for today I want to speak just for a few moments about something that's very dear to my heart and that is children and families. And I want to do that in the context of this government's commitment, first to children through the child action plan. Now on this side of the House we have spoken many times of the action plan for children and of how it is a partnership of numerous departments and secretariats. And the reason for that is that it is not one department or one secretariat that has responsibility for children, but many throughout the government departments.

We've talked about how the action plan's priorities include reducing child and family poverty, strengthening early childhood development, supporting at-risk children, youth, and families, and also how the action plan plays a huge role in investing in communities.

The action plan, Mr. Speaker, is also helping shape the national children's agenda. We remember how proud we were when our Premier received a Champions for Children Award for the development and the implementation of the action plan. Well you might ask, Mr. Speaker, what has the action plan accomplished? Well since it's inception, Saskatchewan's action plan for children has resulted in some significant achievements and I'd just like to list a few of them.

We have an office of the Children's Advocate; we have a Saskatchewan Council on Children; we have integrated school link services; we have early intervention pre-kindergarten programs; we have a family law division of the Court of Queen's Bench and related services; we have numerous Indian child and family service agencies providing child welfare service on reserves; we have a new northern community schools program; a prevention and support grants program; and the establishment of associated entities fund.

And as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, because of this plan Saskatchewan has been recognized nationally and internationally, but we did more for children and families. Last year we launched the Building Independence: Investing in Families strategy, and, Mr. Speaker, the Building Independence: Investing in Families strategy is the most significant social program in 30 years. Under this strategy, three new programs were introduced which are providing health to tens of thousands of Saskatchewan families.

The Saskatchewan Child Benefit and Saskatchewan employment supplement came into effect last July. These programs are assisting parents in making the step from dependence on social assistance to the work force and are helping low-income families with the child-related costs of going to work. The family health benefits program came into effect in August, and this program is providing supplementary health coverage to lower-income families with children.

And, Mr. Speaker, this program is working. Social assistance caseloads showed a major decline last year. Province-wide, the social assistance caseload dropped from 35,631 at the end of December in '97, to 34,003 at the end of December of last year. This is consistent with an overall trend of declining caseloads which began in 1994.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to quote the Minister of Social Services when he says the new building independence program, the Saskatchewan employment supplement, the Saskatchewan Child Benefit and family health benefits, combined with existing government programs such as the provincial training allowance and other elements of the provincial training strategy, represent a fundamental change in the province's approach to welfare. We want to help families get off social assistance and stay off.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to having other opportunities during this session to speak more on these positive initiatives of the government that I've just mentioned in my remarks. And when I think about these things, Mr. Speaker, I can't help but think that the future of this province is very bright and very full of promise.

Now I'm aware that if there is an election this spring or this fall, that this may be my last opportunity to take part in the Throne Speech debate. Now I am so proud to be a part of this government, Mr. Speaker, part of this government when it had to make the tough decisions that we had to make, but also part of this government when we had the many triumphs that we had.

Now the friends I've made on both sides of the House are for life. I've learned much from my colleagues and from my constituents. I will never regret one second of my life as an MLA.

And so, Mr. Speaker, my thanks to you and all my colleagues, and all my constituents for this wonderful experience. And I also want to say a special thanks to my constituency assistant, Donna From, who really is an amazing woman. I'll miss all of you more than you'll ever know.

I can't think of a better way to close my remarks, Mr. Speaker, than with the quote that was read at the end of the Throne Speech, a speech which I totally support. And it is the quote from the poet, Vesta Althea Pickel, in her poem, "Spring in Saskatchewan":

Reach out and feel the air and smell the earth,  
For springtime here is life, new hope, rebirth.

Thank you very much.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this debate today although I have to say I wish I had the eloquence of my friend from Regina northwest in her comments in the House today.

In the few years that I've had the pleasure of serving in this House, I have to say I've heard some wonderful speeches. And I know that whatever happens after this next election that the people of Saskatchewan have to work very hard to find representatives as good as the member for northwest and as well as our colleagues Ed Tchorzewski, who I have always considered to be personally a mentor of mine, as well as Bob Mitchell.

It is an interesting time that this legislature comes to meet. We are on the eve of a new millennium, the eve of a new century, the eve of a new session and sitting and legislature itself as we get ready for potentially an election this spring.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that listening to the Speech from the Throne, I was very pleased with many of the initiatives that the Lieutenant Governor read, with many of the initiatives that this government intends to introduce.

I had the pleasure in 1995, the first opportunity to speak in this House, was to second the motion accepting the Throne Speech, and I think back to what we were discussing in that time and the progress we've made over those four years, and it really has been quite remarkable.

We have seen a period of tremendous growth for our province. We have seen unemployment come down to record lows. We have seen our GDP (gross domestic product) grow. We have seen our taxes come down. We have seen the increases in health care. We've seen a modernization of our health system. We've seen much better services. These are all things that I think as Saskatchewan people we should take great pride in, particularly considering what we came into.

I know on this side of the House, having worked with the government during that 1991 to 1995 period, that the decisions these people grappled with on this side were extremely difficult. And I think now this many years into it we're finally starting to see that those decisions have borne fruit. And I think that that's very positive.

Let me say also, that as I think back on the other Throne Speeches which we've listened to over the years in this House, the one which is perhaps stuck in my mind most was the one in that Christmas session of 1991, with the new government having taken office only a month before and bringing forward its agenda on what was unfortunately a rather gloomy horizon.

We knew that there were unprecedented deficits. We were just starting to grapple with the size of the debt, and we were trying to figure out where to go. And yet that Throne Speech which I think was titled "A New Beginning," offered hope and offered direction for that time period. I remember in particular a line in the Throne Speech which said that this government would once again restore honesty, integrity, and accountability to the government.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Well, Mr. Speaker, some eight years in, I think that the men and women on this side of the House have done just that. And it's one of the things that I think is particularly important as we look at this Throne Speech to compare and contrast how far we have come.

Let me talk for a minute about some of those initiatives. Let me talk about the question of hope and the people's agenda. Because I think often people get caught up . . . and I listen to the opposition members opposite talk about what their party's platform is and what they think should happen.

I'll tell you what the people have told us over the past few years

and it has been very much one of the successes of this government. Our priorities have remained relatively unchanged since 1991. Those priorities were jobs, better health care, and restored financial freedom to this province.

In 1994 we were able to come forward and say that the budget was balanced. Every single year since then we have reduced taxes in this province — every single year since that budget was balanced. Today this platform, this Throne Speech, continues that and offers hope again of more jobs, better health care, lower taxes for Saskatchewan people under this government.

(1600)

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are certainly challenges. As we've watched the last year, the last 18 months, and many of the challenges that we have, particularly in our economy, I have to say personally I'm amazed that we've weathered it as well as we have. The conditions of drought that we've heard expressed from the northwest part of the province, the problems we have with commodity prices on virtually every one of our commodities, from uranium to oil to wheat, have all posed major challenges for us. And yet through all of that because of good planning, because of a resiliency of the Saskatchewan people, and because of a strongly diversified economy, we've weathered that. And I think that that's something Saskatchewan people, as they look back over the years, should take some pride in. Because it is those changes — and I know they've been difficult — but those changes that we have made to our economy and to our social system have allowed us to weather that and to be able to continue on with a very clearly identifiable Saskatchewan solution to the particular problems.

I think it's interesting as we look across the country, and we've seen the approach taken by other governments, be it in Ontario where they have slashed and hacked at the health care system, Alberta and the difficulties we have there with a single-minded approach to government which simply believes that government should remove itself from the economy, remove itself, distance itself from the people, and the difficulties we've seen in terms of what that has brought home to them in terms of their health care system is interesting.

Let me speak for a minute about the health care situation. Over the last two days we've listened to the opposition hammer away on health care. I have to tell you that it has . . . Although I think it's an instructive set of questions that they're asking because it shows where they're coming from, it hasn't exactly been too biting.

I think that is interesting because as was identified today what they can clearly pick out are the problems — what they cannot identify are the solutions. And they have turned their backs on looking for the solutions. We've listened time and again to what their leader and the Saskatchewan Party leadership says. There is nothing new in that. It is a return to value-added audits of health care workers. It is a return to the Texas-style audits that were proposed by the Liberals under the member for Greystone at one point. This is the approach that they're putting forward.

I think we need to take a look at what was being suggested in Alberta right now. This is a party opposite that likes to constantly say look west friends. On Monday in the *Calgary Herald* there is a paper, a report from the doctors that says a quarter of a million Albertans will now be without health care coverage — one quarter of a million. One quarter of a million Albertans are without, potentially are without medicare coverage. Why? Why? Because they didn't pay their premiums. It's amazing. The doctors on Monday were grappling with how to create a system where they could get paid.

One doctor says . . . and I should dig out the article just so I get it absolutely right. The article says, AMA (Alberta Medical Association) President Dr. Rowland Nichol disagreed. He was disagreeing that people are at a risk. He says that's not true. He had several patients at his Calgary practice whose medical needs were not urgent and who were told they would have to pay to get treated. What's of course all the more disturbing is that the doctor then goes on to say, that's an ethical stance the doctors can take.

Well how does it become ethical that you're going to start refusing service, medical service in Canada, unless you pay, I don't know. That, though friends, is the cost of an Alberta style system which you bring forward time and again to this House. That is the cost of going and slashing into health care, freezing health care, even minimalizing the increases in health care. It will lead to a system where in Alberta a quarter of a million Albertans are without medicare coverage.

That's not what we believe in. And that is one of the reasons, my friend from North Battleford, why this Throne Speech is an important cornerstone of what Saskatchewan people believe in.

The introduction of a Saskatchewan medicare Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will show that we support the Canada Health Act. It will say and will ensure that no Saskatchewan people will ever be faced with having to pay to get medical service.

I wish we could say that this were the case everywhere in Canada. Unfortunately, next door in Alberta, that's not the case. And I wish that the Saskatchewan Party would look at that. I wish that when they came forward with their plan of health care and reform, whatever that mean be . . . value for money audits is the last I heard. Minimal increases in spending. I hope that they understand the consequences of that are not a solution which Saskatchewan people want.

When I listen to the reporting of what the opposition had to say about this Throne Speech and saying it did not reflect the priorities of Saskatchewan people, I have to say that they're wrong. The fundamental inclusion of The Saskatchewan medicare Act will be one of those pieces of legislation which Saskatchewan people will stand and salute because it says exactly . . . it identifies clearly the difference between the path that we have taken in this province and the path that they have taken elsewhere.

I've listened for some time to the opposition over the last few months attack the health care workers and attack the health care system, and I find it disturbing. There is no quick and easy solution. There is no quick and easy solution to the problems we face today.

I wish that we were able to quickly arrive at settlements with our health care employees. I remain confident that we will. But I think that fanning the flames of those potential work problems, distorting them as the opposition has a tendency to do, and not identifying any clear alternative, I think is really disturbing.

The member for North Battleford says that it's not the Liberal Party distorting it. Well they don't need to distort it because they caused it. If we had back that \$4 billion that they had yanked out, my guess is that we wouldn't be in quite the same dire straits that we were. As I watch and see Elwin Hermanson sit in the gallery every day and say nothing as he watches over his flock of black sheep over there, and he sits and he's got no solutions. I don't see Dr. Melenchuk. I assume it's because he's chained to the doors of the Plains hospital still with no solutions. None. What are the big solutions?

Well on our side we believe the solutions are continuing with initiatives, new initiatives, like primary health services. We believe in community services. We believe that we should continue to put money into mental health services, into women's health services, into prevention, into home care. These are the things we believe in. These are the alternatives.

The opposition remains focused on an illness-based system — more acute care beds, more acute care beds. Today, as they stand up and say, well, there's 64 fewer beds than we said there were going to be. Well it's not true. That's simply not true.

In Regina we are making progress in getting those beds open again. But at what . . . what was their alternative? Keep the beds open at a risk of patient safety? Is that what the alternative was?

Well we don't know. Because they never identified an alternative. They never identify a solution. All they do is stand and complain and never offer anything new. I would be interested to know if we were to apply their platform to the current problems where we would be at. How would those members sit opposite on a bargaining table with CUPE and say to you, sorry friends, nothing new for your salary. Nothing new to hire new workers. How do you sit across from the union of nurses and say to them, sorry friends, we know that you work hard because listen to all the complaints that we identify on your behalf and our solution is nothing for you.

How do they explain this, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Can they claim to have a credible alternative to what we're offering to say they'll settle the labour strikes, they'll fix the health care system, they'll make sure services are protected. On what? On this year's budget alone? Four years from now as we enter into that millennium, we're still going to be looking at paying people in 1999 dollars? How does that work? Well I know that they're sensitive on the financial management side. We know that. Why wouldn't you be? If you were a Tory, you'd have to be.

I found it interesting reading the Alberta budget this week to note that Alberta is carrying the same size of debt as Saskatchewan. They should take pride in that because they created the debt and so now we're equal to Alberta at least in that regard. It's one place where we're absolutely equal. It's too bad that they're carrying that debt with how much of the



world's oil reserves. It's too bad that they have two and a half, almost three times the population that we do. But thanks to the Tory members opposite, we now have the same size of debt as Alberta. Isn't that a good fortune?

Well I can understand why they're sensitive and why they say, no we're fiscally responsible and our answer to fiscal responsibility is to freeze the budgets of health care, freeze the budgets in education. I can only image what they have planned for some of the other social sectors. I doubt that they would be as fortunate as to see freezes. And instead what they would do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they would slash taxes.

Now that in itself isn't bad. Reduction of taxes has been a major platform of ours. We'll have to see what the budget on the 26th says. But even so, I understand that we'll be passing along the reduction in income tax that the feds announced.

The question, though, is how do we strike a balance? I was reading a recent report from the centre on public policy alternatives which was taking a look at Alberta and the situation there. And what that report said is that as they reduce taxes in Alberta for middle income families, all that resulted in was increased charges that they had to pay.

Alberta is one of the highest, most expensive places to live in terms of the amount of money that private individuals have to pay for health care. It's something that the opposition always forgets to identify. They seem to forget to mention that. And I'm not just talking about the health care premium, I'm talking about the number of services that are not covered.

Let's remember that when Elwin Hermanson campaigned for the leadership of the Saskatchewan Party, he campaigned on a platform of de-insurance saying that there may very well be some things in medicare that are no longer covered. Well that would explain to me how they plan on giving the nurses an increase, how they plan on giving CUPE an increase, and yet at the same time, not increase the health care budget.

And I suspect that what we will see is that as you walk into the doctor and need to get your elbow fixed, or need to get a cast put on, or granny needs some work done on her eyes, my guess is that we are going to start to see service charges. Or we will see a complete de-insurance and simply move it over to the private sector.

I would be interested to know in Alberta, how many publicly funded cataract surgeries there are. I'd be interested to know what is happening there considering that that's the home of Gimbel Eye Clinic. I'd be interested to know what commitment they have to those kind of publicly funded services.

I don't want to be particularly negative in my comments, but I do think that we need to pose the tough questions to the members opposite to ask them what their plan is. I would talk more about the Liberals, but frankly I feel so sorry for them. I just figure we should leave them alone for a little bit.

(1615)

As I watched the member for North Battleford — and I happen to say I listened to his comments yesterday. I actually

appreciated many of his comments in terms of the perspective that he brought as a new member to the House, a relatively new member, and reminding us all that we are here, I think he said, temporarily. I know the Premier who has been here temporarily now for 30 years is . . . certainly I'm sure would share that view. As for the members opposite, well, I think that some of their view of temporary may be considerably shorter.

It brings me to another issue that I want to talk about and that was the uproar we heard on Monday from the members opposite as we announced that we would introduce the respect for constituents Act.

When we came to office in 1991 one of the things we promised was accountability — honesty, integrity, and accountability. This is an important piece of that democratic reform. Many things have changed since 1991 in terms of the democracy and the way that this House operates. I'm pleased to report that despite what the members opposite would argue, the Public Accounts Committee has met regularly. It's completely caught up in its review. Not like the three-year backlog that we saw when we came in in 1991, when the Tories wouldn't allow the committee to meet. We're caught up on that.

There have been other significant changes. The fact that we will be seeing by-elections in June is a significant change — and a very positive one — introduced by this government.

There's a long list of those democratic reforms. This respect for constituents Act I wish we never had to introduce. I wish that we had never seen happen in this House a circumstance as did. The fact that a democratically elected opposition would be . . . first of all, would deep-six its leader, who had carried it to a record number of seats for some 20-some years, would in the dead of the night go and stab her in the back is . . . Fine — that may be the way that party operates. But then, having done that, to all of a sudden realize, oh no, that that didn't save them and that they all had to jump off the ship and swim to whatever poorly tied-together raft was floating by, I think is really unfortunate.

I was disappointed, I have to say, when the member for Humboldt moved over to join the Saskatchewan Party not because her views don't fit in there — I think they certainly do. I think she's part and parcel of that. But I found that disappointing because I think it was really for political opportunism.

As we know, there's been no independent member re-elected to this House since 1924. And clearly, as the member was looking for where her next paycheck was going to come, decided that there was more hope in joining this Saskatchewan Party than attempting to stand by her principles and either coming back to the party that had initially elected her or running again as an independent.

And perhaps all of this would've had much less impact if it had not been for the actions of the member from Athabasca, who I want to welcome to our caucus and to our side of the House. If there had not been such a contrast between these two operations . . . I think a lot of us understood when the member for Greystone decided to sit as an independent, when the member for Humboldt decided to sit as an independent, that those were

principled stands.

But I could not understand how you could simply say, run, on the one hand, as a Liberal, and all of a sudden, months later, decide you're going to become a Conservative. How does that work? How does that work? I don't understand that.

The member opposite says maybe we should phone Glen Clark. Well if so, it would probably be a long conversation because we'd probably offer him some other advice beyond just that.

But just remember — I say to the Leader of the Opposition that the last time you held that seat it was as a Liberal and how you can walk in every day down that aisle and take that seat now as a Conservative, I don't understand. How you could part and parcel sign your name to a party to replace the Tories, claiming it's some blended operation, knowing that in the process you have diverted \$350,000 from the democratically elected opposition to Saskatchewan Party caucus coffers, how can you do that? How can there be that kind of thinking that this is somehow acceptable?

So now we've got the Tories back in opposition. Drummed out of office in 1991, drummed out of the opposition in 1995, and they're back again.

Well I'll tell you, the members opposite look at us and say how can we be so partisan as to bring in a respect for constituents Act. Well, friends opposite, I have to tell you I think we are the only party that believes in respect for our constituents, because if you did, you would have gone to a by-election. You claim instead that you are going to introduce recall legislation, and yet when people drop by your office, member from Melfort, and ask for a recall petition, what did you tell them? You said you'll have to wait until the next election; you have to wait until the next election.

Well isn't that a commitment even to your own great enshrined platform. Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable. As we watch this group of Tories opposite try to justify how they could turn their backs on their constituents, I just don't understand. And they argue then, the only argument that I've seen mounted, is that, my goodness, it may not be constitutional. It may violate our individual rights.

Well the piece that we need to remember is that we are not here representing individual views; we are here representing the views of our constituents. And perhaps we should understand that and remember that as we sit here. I don't expect that you'll vote for the respect for constituents Act. I'm not sure whether it will be retroactive or not; it's probably not a bad idea. We've got a few by-elections scheduled for June anyway. It might be a good initiative to decide to put a few more up.

But regardless, I think what we should remember is that there will be an election in June, or October, or June of next year. But there will be an election coming. And at some point you will have to go and face your constituents on the doorsteps and explain how it is that you turned your back on them a year and a half ago. It will be interesting to hear that. It will be interesting to hear that defence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk for a minute about

education. In 1995 when I had the opportunity, the honour of seconding the response to the Throne Speech, education was a key component of the initiatives that we identified at that time as we moved forward to 1999 that we would want to work on.

Today I think we've seen great success, particularly in our post-secondary sector, in terms of how we've seen the growth. I look at the University of Regina which borders my riding, and we see the growth of the research park over there, we see the new high technology coming in, we see the new construction over at the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) facilities that'll consolidate and greatly expand and enhance those facilities. And I feel proud about that.

I'm also proud to read that today more than 90 per cent of our schools have an Internet connection. This is an important component as we get ready for the 21st century and the information-based economy.

I'm proud of our record in our inner city communities, on our community schools initiative. Although my riding does not have any community schools, I have to tell you that it is important to us on this side of the House that we have that same quality of education throughout the province that we enjoy in areas like the south end of Regina.

The front page of the *Leader-Post* today in fact there was a speaker from ... one of the Roughriders was speaking I believe, a Mr. Grier. And he was talking about his experiences — talking about his experiences going to school down in the southern U.S. and talking about the problems that they have down there versus the problems we have here in Saskatchewan.

Several members from this Assembly had an opportunity as part of a CPA (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) tour, and in fact a member from Melfort I believe was down at the same time I was to a conference in Washington where we were taking a look at what was happening with American school reforms.

I have to tell you that in terms of our education system, we are very, very fortunate that here in Canada and here in Saskatchewan we do have as well a funded, publicly funded education system as we do.

The problems that they have in terms of curriculum, the problems that they have in terms of violence in their schools, are all very unusual I think for us to hear, because we simply take for granted that that's not the case. We take for granted that we have a relevant curriculum. We take for granted that we have safe schools.

And I think that the work that's been done over the past few years, particularly I want to say with the community schools project, has helped to ensure that that will be the case as we move on.

These projects — and I forget the number of them now; I think there's some 23 of them — are really very important to ensure that we look at students in a holistic way, as a whole being, and try and meet their needs not simply feeding them textbook information. And this is a real success I think, of this government. It's something I'm very proud that our government

has introduced.

I'm also very pleased that we have put as much commitment into capital as we have, not simply in terms of the construction of new schools, but in terms of the type of educational equipment we're offering.

A couple of weeks ago the Minister of Education and I had a chance to tour Campbell Collegiate which is in the heart of my riding. And I was amazed at how the schools have changed even in the 15-some years since I was at one.

The fact that at one point we walked into a classroom and there is the TV camera on and they're broadcasting out a calculus class to Yorkton and a few other small communities, I think is really quite impressive. It's a quality of education that a lot of people didn't have, didn't have that kind of access to.

It also I think helps to break down that sense that somehow our urban schools were going to be better than our rural schools. And it allows us I think to deal with a lot of the challenges particularly in rural Saskatchewan that we've seen in the past.

Technology, if it's properly dealt with, can be a huge benefit to Saskatchewan students. Through things like SCN (Saskatchewan Communications Network) we are able to see distance education offered, through the work being done in our high schools, through the improved Internet access. These are all real improvements.

I think it's also very important that we understand as we look at our universities, both in Saskatoon and in Regina, that we understand that these are truly first rate institutions in this country.

We've heard a lot in the last year about crumbling buildings at the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) and certainly this is a difficulty. I know that when I was president of the Students Union back in, I guess it was '90-91, Convocation Hall at that point was condemned. I'm not surprised. I think it was probably condemned when my mother was there some few years before that. This is an ongoing set of problems in terms of how we deal with that. And yet we have worked co-operatively with the universities to attempt to find solutions to that.

Here in Regina we've worked co-operatively with the U of R (University of Regina) to try and find solutions to the capital problems that they face. The new Student Centre and Fine Arts facilities have been a great enhancement. The addition of ISM (Information Systems Management Corporation) and the info research park will certainly help out our engineering program here.

And we're starting to see our universities mature. And I think this is a very, very positive thing for Saskatchewan as we get ready to enter into that 21st century.

There are those, I believe, in this House who think that we cannot compete as we head forward into the 21st century or believe that we can only compete if we slash the taxes in this province. And I want to tell you I disagree with that. Because as I've said earlier, by slashing the taxes we have to understand that there's a cost and that usually comes in a slashing of the

publicly funded education system.

When I was the Student Union president and Grant Devine's government was on this side of the benches, I will tell you that we went through, at the U of S, unprecedented increases in tuition because of the problems in funding and their lack of funding of those universities. Unprecedented increases.

Now last year at the U of R there was a 2 per cent increase in tuition. It's unfortunate there was any increase. I had wished that the universities had taken advantage of the fact that we had provided them with enough money not to have to increase tuition, but they did not avail themselves of that. Nevertheless it was not like the record increases that we were seeing when the Tories were in office.

(1630)

Now the Tories will say, oh, but it's not true, we increased funding to the education and we increased funding to health care at that point.

Well perhaps so, except today what we know is that the Tories, in order to deal with their problem of lack of credibility on finances, are now saying zero increases or minimal increases. Well what is the alternative? How do you deal with that? How do you pay faculty salaries? How do you pay teacher salaries? How do you pay for the increases in the cost of living? How do you deal with the new technologies?

And it is the same in education as it is in health care. The opposition does not have a credible plan. Its plan doesn't work financially. Its plan for health care doesn't work in terms of needing the needs. Its plan for education doesn't work in terms of meeting the needs of the students and the economy. And yet they still seem to feel that that is the direction we should be following.

I'm surprised that the first question period in this House that the opposition would stand up and essentially say, Mr. Premier, why is it you don't like our platform. Well isn't that self evident? Isn't obvious? Of course it is. We don't like that platform because it's a platform that doesn't solve anything. It doesn't add up.

I think as the Finance minister once said, it was just plain goofy. And it is as we listen to it. And we watch and maybe, maybe what'll happen, maybe what will happen is that they will go back and sit down and rework the plan. Or maybe they will be able to finally come forward and explain to SUN. And I'm interested in hearing what the members opposite are going to tell SUN that they're going to do on their salary increases. How would they settle the current dispute with the nurses?

I'm listening and I don't hear any answer. What is your solution to the nursing problem? How do you settle that contract? How do you settle that contract with CUPE. Mr. Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order. Order, order. Now the hon. member is a veteran member of the House and he'll recognize of course that the appropriate place to direct debate in the House is through the Chair, and I'm sure that he'll want to conduct his debate in the proper manner and continue with his

typical enthusiasm.

**Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies — that is true.

But I think it is incumbent upon the members opposite to come forward, particularly in this session, with a credible alternative to what we are presenting today and what we will present on March 26 with the budget, and tell us what that solution is; because unfortunately as much as every member in this House would simply like to wish it away, we have got to somehow find a contract with the nurses. And we have got to settle a contract with CUPE . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the Tories across say if we had not made such a mess of health care.

Oh, boy. Let me tell you. It was the Tories that made a mess of health care. It was the Liberals who slashed the budgets for health care funding. That's the mess. Building hospitals that don't need to be there for any purpose except getting their members re-elected, and that didn't even work.

Ask yourself what was the point of that, Mr. Speaker? Fifty-two facilities. Fifty-two facilities. For what? For what? And by going with a high cost, overcapitalized system, they were running a billion point two in deficits. Unsustainable.

So we come in and we say how do we fix this? We convert the . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order, order. Now we've got two simultaneous debates going on here. Order, order. Now one is on the record and the hon. member for Regina South has the floor, and I'd ask all other hon. members who want to enter into debate to wait their turn and put their remarks on the record.

**Mr. Thomson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But going back to this question of where we ran into the difficulties, let's remember that we had an overcapitalized health care system. What we have done is by converting these facilities, we have made more efficient use of funding.

Nobody's lying in the streets waiting for health care. Nobody has died as a result of the changes. No. You see, this is the problem. The members opposite are attempting to paint a picture of crisis. There is not a crisis in Saskatchewan health care today. There are problems in health care; there are problems in education. But there are not problems . . . there is not a crisis in health care as they say opposite.

The member for Cannington unfortunately had missed my earlier comments about the situation in Alberta so perhaps I'll restate them again. If we had gone with the so-called Saskatchewan Party's platform, if we had implemented the Tory type changes, if they had been here, perhaps we would have a system like Alberta where today a quarter of a million Albertans risk losing medicare. A quarter of a million . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, the member opposite is now . . . I don't know where he's living to say that Alberta doesn't have a waiting list.

Oh, this is getting more and more surreal. I'm waiting for Grant Devine to reappear in here and say he passed the budget that

year. This is just not a case.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have made tough decisions from 1995, in 1996, in 1991, and we'll make tough decisions this year, and those decisions have been to the benefit of Saskatchewan people. Saskatchewan people have benefited first and foremost by sound financial management which has restored this province to a stable, affordable level of government.

Now the member opposite . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Although the member opposite I know doesn't believe my figures, let me read to him one of his, some figures from one of his favourite groups, the good, old Fraser Institute. Saskatchewan — they are showing here public sector spending as a percentage of GDP — 1981 when the Blakeney government left office it was at 38.8 per cent. By 1992 when we took office again it had risen to 63.4 per cent — 63.4 per cent. Today we have gotten it back to a sustainable level of 46 per cent.

Now this party opposite has difficulties, Mr. Speaker. Between 1982 and 1992, late '91, they had rapidly run up the bills and the credit cards of this province — rapidly running them up. You wanted a new hospital; you got a new hospital. A new nursing home; you got a new nursing home. A particular member is in trouble? Build them whatever they need. That was the solution that they offered. The reduction in taxes? Never happened. The reduction in taxes never happened.

I listened earlier as the member from Melfort said . . . was pooh, pooing the fact that we had reduced the sales tax by 2 per cent. I would remind the member from Melfort that when we took office in 1991 there was a harmonized 7 per cent sales tax. We will remind them that there was a harmonized 7 per cent sales tax in this province. Remember that was the tax that was also applied to services as well as goods. Remember that was as you were tagging, as the members opposite were tagging along with good old Brian Mulroney and his good financial plans. That was their solution. Harmonize GST.

Today the sales tax in Saskatchewan is lower than it was when we took office in 1991 because we removed from that tax base so many goods. Because we refused to put in the Tory tax on services. Imagine paying 7 per cent on every single service. That was the Tory plan . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It was.

I appreciate the member for Cannington being in here today because at least he has the courage to defend the Tory record that he so dearly supports. Unlike the member for Canora or Melfort who pretend that they're not actually part of that agenda. It's good to see that kind of defence from the real Conservative members.

But it is, it is just unbelievable to hear the sense of denial that these members have about what they had really done to the province and where we were headed. And to somehow pretend that their fiscal plans now, that after all their years in the wilderness, that somehow they should be welcomed back onto the treasury benches.

Well I am just not certain that the people of Saskatchewan are going to see it that way. We saw them ring up spending up to 1992. Now they're saying, no, we're not going to spend; we're going to cut taxes, not realizing . . . Or maybe they do realize. Maybe I don't give them enough credit. Maybe they understand exactly what that's going to do. That is going to off-load the costs of those services directly onto individuals through service charges, through user fees.

Let's be honest about it. Let's be honest about it, because, Mr. Speaker, that's exactly where we're at. That is the . . . that is the cost. The member opposite is talking about the municipalities, saying we unloaded to the municipalities.

When we came to office in 1991 and when I was elected in 1995, people said time and again what they wanted was a platform that said protect medicare, create jobs, reduce taxes. That, Mr. Speaker, is exactly what happened. That is what we have done.

It has been a reprioritization of government. And I think it draws back directly to what this speech this week has identified. Those priorities of ours have remained constant. We will protect medicare by introducing a new Saskatchewan medicare Act, and I wait to see how the members opposite, on a standing vote, vote on the Saskatchewan medicare Act. Are you in favour of medicare will be the question that they are posed, Mr. Speaker, or are they opposed to medicare?

We understand with the Liberals — they're probably in favour of medicare but just don't want to pay for it. We've seen that. We understand where they're coming from.

But where is that party going to stand? Are they going to stand and vote in favour of the Saskatchewan medicare Act or will they oppose it? That's the question, that's the question is where are they going to be? Yes there's been a reconfiguration in the system.

Yes there have been changes in terms of the hospitals. The major hospital in my . . . adjacent to my riding has been closed.

But do you know what? The people in my riding receive better service today than they did in 1995. They didn't have access to a MRI. They did not have access to the spiral CT scanners. They did not have access to the new cardio lab. They did not have access to the same level of mental health services that they do. They did not have access to the same level of home care services.

Today people are better off in the south end of Regina as they are in Southey, as they are in just about every other part of this province. And I think we need to remember that. I look forward to campaigning in this next election. I look forward to campaigning on it. I look forward to going out and explaining to people what we have done with health care. And I will tell you that people will agree that we have better health care today than we did.

But what is the opposition going to campaign on? They are going to campaign on freezing the health care budget. They are going to campaign on freezing nurses' wages. They are going to campaign on freezing the wages of the home care workers.

That's what the result of their policy is, Mr. Speaker. And it is . . .

**An Hon. Member:** — Shameful.

**Mr. Thomson:** — Shameful is the best word in terms of the approach that is being brought forward. Duplicitous is another excellent word for what it is. Because as much as we would all like to hold the line, or whatever nice euphemism they have, the fact is it's not going to work.

And in the coming weeks as we have to grapple with the situation potentially with the nurses, I will be interested to see how the members opposite come forward with a solution on that. This is why I'm interested in seeing, Mr. Speaker. Because there is no way for us to go back to the style of spending that they had, to go back to the style of raising taxes that they had, to go back to the style of running this government that they had. The people of Saskatchewan aren't going to put up with it.

The interim member for North Battleford I hear talking from his seat and saying that the Liberals have an even better plan. Well, I'm not sure that in this election that there's going to be enough whiteout in this province to fix the Liberal's plan. I can only imagine what they'll have to cook up this time.

At least you've got to say about the Tory members opposite, somehow or another they have cobbled together a plan. It's not a good one, it's not a sustainable one, but at least they have it. The poor Liberals — I'm sure that the five of them there will run on five separate plans. I am absolutely certain of it. Maybe six. Of course, by then there may only be two of them. I'm not sure who else is going to move across the floor. It's a sad, it is a sad state of affairs, Mr. Speaker, on that side of the House.

(1645)

Mr. Speaker, the agenda laid out in the Throne Speech is a good one.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — It is an approach that we hold dear. It is an approach that we feel strongly about, and it is an approach which is supported by the people of Saskatchewan. And if there is any doubt about it, the members opposite will know very soon that we'll have the opportunity either to campaign in their by-elections or to campaign in a general election. One way or the other we will have an opportunity to face this issue.

And I suspect that those by-elections or that general election will see a return of the members on this side of the House, will see new members come in where we've had retirements, and we'll see just a few seats on that side come sit over here without their incumbents. I am quite certain of that — that the seats may very well move over here, but the incumbents are going to have to find something else to do.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that this is a good Throne Speech. It offers hope at a time when Saskatchewan people are asking for it. It is offering solutions to the problems that we're seeing today and it offers something that this party — this is probably the only party that could offer it — and

that's credibility. It is credibility. You know that when we identify a plan that it will work. It will work. Health care is going to work. We can see the progress in education and on the 26th we will see a financial plan come down which the people of Saskatchewan I know will endorse.

That's a strong foundation. It's something we have to be proud of on this side, and it is something which I hope all members will look at more seriously.

I was concerned, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I was concerned as I was listening to some of these speeches from the opposition members in the Saskatchewan Party over the last couple of days, and their concern about how somehow or another there's this belief that the respect for constituents Act somehow is picking on them. And they talk about how they need to . . . how this is so terrible to them and it's such a political Act.

This Throne Speech is not about them. It has nothing to do with the opposition. This is a Throne Speech of the people's priorities. Go and ask the people the question you haven't asked them since you created your dark-of-the-night party. Do they or do they not support you? And the only way any one of us, the only way any one of us can know that is to go and stand for re-election.

And I look forward to it. I look forward to being nominated in a few weeks. I look forward to being nominated in a few weeks and taking on the Liberals, hopefully taking on a Tory or a Saskatchewan Party. I understand there may actually be other candidates running. I suspect there may be a Green Party candidate. I look forward to it. The campaign will be excellent. And then at the end of it we will see who the people of Saskatchewan support.

But this question of the respect for constituents Act is an Act that they're asking for. And I suggest that you read your local weekly papers when they come out next week and see what the people in your communities are saying. Because they would support this. This is a popular measure. This is a people's agenda. This is not about the members opposite — it isn't. And we have done our best to try and focus it on that.

Rather than talk about the fact that \$350,000 was diverted from the Liberal opposition into the Saskatchewan Party caucus coffers, as happened when you guys created your party — Leader of the Opposition and his extra pay, the extra money for the Tory support staff . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, I'm not saying that.

The member opposite asks if I'm saying if it was illegal. It's not for me to advise the Tories on illegalities. Far be it for me to say anything on that. What I am saying is it diverted funds from a democratically elected party over to these folks, and I think it's unfortunate.

But at the end of the day, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have as many Tories in the House today to argue with directly or indirectly through you. But it is interesting to hear their perspectives because I'll tell you as we go through the next several weeks of this session there are going to be a lot of questions which are going to get asked. Questions that they'll

certainly pose during question period. Questions that we'll be posing during our speeches to them.

And it is a good prelude to the debate that we're all going to have in a few months as we head off to the polls. For my part I feel good about going into the election, be it tomorrow, be it two months from now, be it 18 months from now. With the record of this government, with the approach that we will be taking in this session, and with the overall consistent approach that we have taken since 1991 to restore honesty, integrity, and competence to government. That is something Saskatchewan people will endorse loud and clear.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to save some of my speech for later on, but I want to talk for a minute about some of the other things which are important to my constituency specifically. And let me tell you, the members here, some of the benefits that we've seen, particularly on the job side.

It is interesting to note, it is interesting to note that from 1992 to 1997 Saskatchewan led the nation in economic growth — led the nation. It's something we never hear from the members opposite. They don't celebrate the accomplishments of Saskatchewan people. They simply refuse to accept that. 1992 to 1997 — Saskatchewan leads the nation in economic growth and yet we hear nothing about it.

Are there difficulties today? Sure. I wish oil was at a higher price. I wish wheat was at a higher price. I wish uranium was at a higher price. There are many things I wish, Mr. Speaker.

There are many things I wish, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you that we have a lot to celebrate. We don't hear them talk about the fact that during that time period retail sales in this province grew 45 per cent. We forget that. Members opposite don't mention that. They certainly don't mention the fact that it outpaced Alberta during that time period.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that one of the reasons retail sales grew was because we got rid of that harmonized sales tax that those guys put on. I'd be remiss not to mention that. You'll remember the impact that that had on the restaurant sector in 1991. And we saw that increase almost immediately upon taking office on that first day of November when we said that was it, the harmonized tax was gone. Retail sales have grown steadily. Even when we had to go through the period with the increased sales tax up to 9 per cent, retail sales continued to grow.

But we don't hear anything about that. We don't hear them talk about the fact that capital investments were up 63 per cent during that time period, or that the value of farm assets had increased 31 per cent. We hear nothing about that. Because that doesn't fit their narrow agenda.

We don't hear of the fact that the value of manufacturing shipments was up 76 per cent since we took office — 76 per cent. That's a phenomenal increase and speaks, I think, to the diversification and the vision of the business leaders and the co-operative sector and the work that this government has done

in terms of setting a foundation for that kind of growth. Today Saskatchewan's economy is more diversified than it ever has been in our history. Grant Devine talked all the time about diversification, but never did it. But never did it. The diversification that has happened has happened since 1992. That's a fact. But it's a fact we don't hear from the members opposite.

I wish that we would hear this, but we don't. We listen to the gloom and doom on the jobs front from the members opposite. Yet I want to tell you, Regina, which suffered under the initial set of cuts we had to do in 1992 and 1993 to get those balanced budgets, is back. Its economy changed. It grew.

And last year — well, listen to this, Mr. Speaker, and I know the members opposite will want to hear it as well — Regina led the west in job growth. We did. It's amazing. We still do — 7,000 new jobs created in Regina last year. There were 4,000 more people working in Regina in January than there were a year before. I understand those stats hold up in February.

The members opposite say, what about the rest of Saskatchewan. Well we have been fortunate here in Regina to be on the front edge of job growth. And I know, and the members opposite know, and it is folly on their part not to admit that they know.

A big part of the problem with job creation in the rural area right now has to do with the fact that oil has barely cracked \$13 a barrel. This is what they don't understand. This is what the members opposite don't understand. There's a member talking away about the others but he again neglects the fact that Saskatchewan led the nation. Forgets to mention that a record number of people were working in this province last year, a record number — 478,000 — on virtually the same population. And yet the members opposite forget that; the members opposite forget that.

And here, oh well they're complaining the population's not growing. And then the population grows and they complain the jobs aren't growing. The fact is the population is growing, the number of jobs are growing, the economy is growing. We've seen diversification. This is a positive foundation for Saskatchewan to enter the 21st century on.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Thomson:** — Mr. Speaker, we are nearing 5 o'clock and I hate to prolong the events of the House today. I wanted to make just a couple of other very quick comments. And there are a couple of things I'm very proud of here in Regina.

First of all, it's the fact that I look to the Crown corporations. And I know the members opposite would like to sell them all off, but we really have seen some real successes. And SaskTel is a real leader in terms of turning the economy around. I think that the testament to that is the fact Netscape Communications out of California came to Saskatchewan and signed a partnership agreement with SaskTel which is particularly aimed at providing Internet services to small and medium sized businesses.

There's a real opportunity here for us to capitalize on that.

There's a real opportunity for us, particularly in the health sector service, to grow. And we've seen this interest out of the U.S. even in terms of making use of Netscape and SaskTel's services. These are real positives and they're real changes.

The fact that we've got a new \$11 million petroleum research centre being built over on the U of R campus I think is another positive. There have been changes. There have been a lot of . . . We've had to think about the city's economy differently, but we're seeing that that growth has paid off. I know that when the commodity prices turn around, that growth we will see in rural Saskatchewan again as well.

The member opposite asks, do I know when the commodity prices are going to turn around and when that's going to happen. I will tell you that I am absolutely certain that the potential . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member, the member opposite says that I don't have a clue on when it's going to turn. Who does? Who does?

The member opposite I'm sure has an opinion on it, and I'm sure he'll provide a platform piece on it and a plan to get there. And it will be just as valuable as every other plan that they've presented and just as accurate. I am absolutely convinced of that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the next few weeks I know that this government will be bringing forward other announcements on job creation, particularly aimed at the rural sector. And I suspect the members opposite, listening to their clamourings on the other side, will take a very keen interest and will rise to support it, as we will on this side.

Mr. Speaker, I think with that I will end my comments and simply say that I will vote against the amendment proposed by the members opposite and will support the sound, solid plan laid out in the Throne Speech on Monday. Thank You.

**Mr. Kowalsky:** — Mr. Speaker, it will be my pleasure to speak to this motion, but it being very close to 5 o'clock, I would suggest that what we should be doing is calling the clock, and I would just move adjournment of debate at this time.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

