

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 the topic of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement. The prayer reads as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition today come from the city of Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have petitions to present today on behalf of the disenfranchised widows. The prayer reads:

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

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

These petitions come from the Regina, Estevan, all over southeast Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

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

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to demand that the federal government work with Saskatchewan to put in place a farm aid package that provides real relief to those who need it, and that the provincial government develop a long-term farm safety net program as it promised to do when it cancelled GRIP against the wishes of farmers.

The signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from the little city of Rhein, Saskatchewan.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of people from this province who would like to see the Crown Construction Tender Agreement scrapped.

And the prayer reads as follows:

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

The signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Saskatoon.

I so present.

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise once again on behalf of parents and students and interested citizens in Saskatchewan who are concerned about children with specific learning disabilities.

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

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

The people who have signed this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are from Kinistino, Melfort, Beatty, and the James Smith Reserve.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan. The prayer reads:

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 towards road maintenance and construction so Saskatchewan residents may have a safe highway system that meets their needs.

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

And the signatures are from the good folks in Broadview, Whitewood, Grenfell.

I so present.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I present petitions on behalf of petitioners from Battleford, Delmas, and North Battleford concerned about the confusing and dangerous entrance to the city of North Battleford and praying that the intersection of Highway 40 with Highway 16 be relocated.

I so present.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions on behalf of citizens of the province. These ones are concerned about the deteriorating state of our highway system in the province. The prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

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

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

Those who've signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from the communities of Woodrow, Gravelbourg, Glenbain, Coderre, and Limerick.

I so present.

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

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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the people that have signed these petitions are from the Mankota and Glentworth area of the province.

I so present.

Mr. Goohsen: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to present a new petition. I'll read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the Government of Saskatchewan to listen to the petitioners humbly request immediate implementation of the infrastructure plan for replacement and upgrade of Highway No. 13 to facilitate the orderly east-west movement of people, goods, and resources.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This came in from the town of Eastend administrator and the signators are mostly from Eastend. There's a couple from Saskatoon and I see one from Lloydminster . . . or Lethbridge I guess it is.

And I'm happy to present it on their behalf today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have petitions here on behalf of Emma Lake and Christopher Lake association ratepayers. There's 523 petitions signed. The petitioners are requesting:

That the legislative changes be made to The Election Act, 1996, and to the municipality Act, to enable all ratepayers in the school division to have the democratic rights to vote in the school board election. The current legislation

sanctions taxation without representation.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Clerk: — According to order the petitions presented at the last sitting have been reviewed and found to be in order. Pursuant to rule 12(7) they are hereby received.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 11 ask the government the following question:

Has your government considered, and this is to the Minister of Agriculture incidentally, has your government considered an acreage-set-aside program to reduce the number of seeded acres in Saskatchewan's farming sector? Has your department discussed this American approach with SARM members who have promoted this \$20 per acre concept? And have you made any efforts to get the federal government involved in this type of program?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two constituents of mine, Robert and Irma Hammermeister, sitting in your gallery, from Frobisher, here to observe the proceedings today and I would ask the Assembly to welcome them to our proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because yesterday, March 21, was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. March 21 has been designated of this day because of actually the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa.

Some will remember that was the day that peaceful demonstrators were protesting against apartheid when they were massacred by South African security forces. In 1966 the United Nations declared that March 21 would be the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Last night I had the pleasure of joining a large number of people here in Regina at an event over at the university to — on a more hopeful note — celebrate the spring free from racism. The event was a day of drumming against racism, and it was a celebration of many different cultures that brought together four different drum groups. And we're very proud that our Minister of Labour was one of the people drumming last night in . . . to support this worthy cause.

I know all the members share a concern about the growth of racism in our province and in our society. And I would hope they would join with me today in recognizing this important event.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to join with the member from Regina South in recognizing yesterday as a very, very important day in the world. In 1966 the United Nations General Assembly declared March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

I rise in this Assembly today on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party to recognize the Sharpeville massacre. On March 21, 1960 the police in Sharpeville opened fire on a crowd of over 70 unarmed blacks who were surrounding the police station demonstrating against apartheid. All of the demonstrators were killed and over 180 people injured.

The Sharpeville massacre aroused international indignation to an unprecedented degree. South Africa sustained a net flow of foreign investment capital and appeals for military, economic, and sporting boycotts began to be given serious attention.

Mr. Speaker, we are entering into a new millennium — a time in which new hope and prosperity can be enjoyed by all. It our duty as a society to respect everyone, regardless of race, colour, national or ethnic origin.

The elimination of racial discrimination and racism can be accomplished if we allow ourselves to be reminded of the tragedies that occur when we are not responsible for our actions. We have made significant progress on our journey to racial harmony and I ask all members to recognize this very important occasion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Politicians as Actors

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night many watched the Academy Awards and found them lacking compared to the overacting of the NDP (New Democratic Party) and the Saskatchewan Party.

The Saskatchewan Party bad actors have credibility problems of their own, especially after today's release of the *National Post* compass poll showing the Saskatchewan Party at 23 per cent. Compare that to the Saskatchewan Party's own December poll showing their party at 34 per cent.

Now if that was accurate, their party has slipped 11 points in three months. If that poll was not accurate, then how can you trust them when it comes to numbers regarding health care and highways and budgets? Either their party is sinking faster than the *Titanic* or their original polling numbers were done a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

This afternoon in Carrot River a public meeting is going on about the future of the Carrot River Hospital. When the Liberals first raised the issue of rural hospital closures, we saw spin

doctors going in to try to hold the NDP's thin, red line.

The Saskatchewan Party complains because the Liberals invite people to these meetings. Obviously they are complaining because the Liberals see this as the people's priority while the Saskatchewan Party don't care about health, just politics.

We have bad actors in government who mismanage the health care as badly as Grant Devine Tories mismanaged budget. While on the other side we have the Saskatchewan Party who prefer to analyze this. The glitz of these bad actors will fool nobody, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to election day.

North Battleford Telephone Pioneers Make Donation

Ms. Murrell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to commend the North Battleford Telephone Pioneers for their recent support of two seniors' projects. On March 11, the North Battleford Pioneers donated a total of \$2,400 to River Heights Lodge and the Battlefords District Care Centre.

The River Heights contribution will be used to purchase a set of physiotherapy parallel bars. This equipment is used to assist residents in walking. The exercise strengthens a person's lower body thereby increasing and maintaining the person's mobility.

The Battlefords District Care Centre funds will be used for the gazebo and outdoor area refurbishing project which are located just off the ward 4, a special care unit for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

The Telephone Pioneers are a group of retired or current local SaskTel employees who put in many long and hard volunteer hours to help serve their community better. They believe in supporting the seniors who helped build both their community and the province. The group is a prime example of how a community can work together to maintain continuity and strength. I thank them and congratulate them for their efforts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bruno Athlete Attends Canada Winter Games

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize a fine young athlete from my constituency from the community of Bruno, Joelle Buckle. Joelle recently attended the Canada Winter Games in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland, from March 1 to 7. She had been chosen as a member of Team Saskatchewan's wheelchair basketball squad.

Joelle has had past experience in national competition. She participated in the 1997 Canada Summer Games in Brandon where she competed in wheelchair racing. But basketball and wheelchair racing are not the only sports Joelle excels in.

In February she won a gold medal in the short distance sit-ski competition at the Canadian Disabled Cross Country Skiing Championship at Whitetail Ski Resort in North Battleford. To recognize her sporting accomplishments, Ms. Buckle has been awarded the Ada MacKenzie Award of \$200 from the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association.

Joelle Buckle is an extraordinary young girl, Mr. Speaker. She's

a hard-working, determined, spirited young woman who has embraced her disability as a means of reaching her full potential and who is a source of inspiration to all. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Retail Store Marks 70th Anniversary

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I suspect that you and other members of the House have often wondered how it is that the member from Saskatchewan Rivers and the member from Prince Albert Northcote and myself look so stylish on certain occasions. I know that you know but you've just been too polite to ask us, Mr. Speaker.

The answer is simple. For years we have been patrons of Ted Matheson Men's Wear in Prince Albert, and before us, some of our friends and relatives were patrons.

I mention that because this month Ted Matheson Men's Wear is celebrating its 70th year of continuous business on the same block.

Ted Matheson Sr. opened the store on March 19, 1929 — not the best of years to open a store, but he survived and he prospered until his death in 1971. His sons, Fred and Jack, then joined the business and ran it for another 35 years. And currently Jack and his son, Fred, are proprietors.

That's 70 years and three generations of making sure that Prince Albert MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) look sharp, feel sharp. And he's even going into a line of women's clothing, Mr. Speaker.

But Mathesons are not only known for business, they're also known for their community spirit. And their motto is providing service and quality.

Congratulation to Ted Matheson Men's Wear for 70 years, and my best wishes for the next 70.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Juvenile Provincial Curling Playdowns

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending the juvenile provincial playdowns in Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan. The Gravelbourg curling club in the town of Gravelbourg proudly hosted the festivities which featured 16 mixed teams from all regions of the province.

In this the International Year of Francophones, the three-day event was a great opportunity for the town to welcome these visitors and share some of their warm hospitality and heritage. An enjoyable and rewarding experience was had by all who attended, both on and off the ice.

During the time the youths were not curling, they were treated to tours of many of Gravelbourg's historical heritage sites.

I'd like to commend all of the teams for the spirit of competition that they exhibited, with special mention of the two Thunder Creek entries: the foursome of Amanda Jahnke, Twyla

Leisle, Patti Dueck and Nicole Giydon from the town of Morse; as well as the host team from Gravelbourg, Mr. Speaker, that of Daniel Carrobourg, Candice Cooper, Guy Perrault and Colin Gauthier.

I applaud the work done by all involved in making the event a great success and I wish all of the participants in this event continued good luck and the brightest of futures in their sport of curling.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Country Music Association Awards

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the guns were blazing last night at the Regina Inn as the Saskatchewan Country Music Association held its 10th awards show in the Applause Dinner Theatre.

Regina's own Faster Gun led the pack with four awards including: non-touring group of the year, song and single of the year, and group of the year. Then along came Regina's Tex Pistols, whose album *Not Suitable for Airplay* won the album of the year category. The group was also named back-up band of the year, while their band leader Brian Sklar was named male vocalist of the year.

North Battleford's Lorrie Church came away with the female vocalist of the year, and fans' choice entertainer of the year. Stephanie Thompson of Fort Qu'Appelle won in the video of the year category, and the Cockrum Sisters of Meadow Lake won gospel album of the year.

Prince Albert's brother-and-sister team of Jim and Brenda Chute, formerly of Nokomis, won the category of vocal collaboration while the group Stepping Out, also from Prince Albert, were named the most promising artists.

For the fourth consecutive year, Melfort radio station CJVR was named country music station of the year, while Regina's Pump Country Roadhouse won the nightclub of the year category.

Special awards included the legend and legacy award presented to veteran Saskatoon broadcaster Denny Carr, while the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority received the international humanitarian award. The Kinsmen Club of Saskatchewan also presented Johner Brothers with the entertainer of the decade award.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health care for Patients Seeking Out of Country Treatment

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

Madam Minister, despite NDP rhetoric to the contrary, your government's failing health reforms have created a two-tiered health care system in Saskatchewan. One level of service for people living in Saskatoon and Regina, and another level of

service for people living in rural communities.

One level of service for people with money to seek treatment outside of Saskatchewan, another level of service for people who can't afford treatment outside of Saskatchewan. Now we find out that for Saskatchewan people who seek medical treatment outside the province the NDP deny access to follow-up treatment in Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, will you confirm that this is your policy of the NDP government, that when a patient seeks medical treatment outside of Saskatchewan, necessary follow-up treatments in Saskatchewan are denied?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the members of the Saskatchewan Party are busy today meeting in Carrot River. I think they're meeting at about 2 o'clock with the people in the Carrot River area. And I also understand that the Liberal leader is also there. In fact the Liberals have been busy advertising the Saskatchewan Party meeting, which is all very confusing.

Mr. Speaker, as the people of this province know, there are literally hundreds and hundreds of health services available to the people of this province. There are occasions when those particular health services are not available and with the agreement of the Department of Health, people who cannot receive their health services here can be sent outside of Saskatchewan for treatment. And if the treatment is not available outside of Saskatchewan in the country, then those people can be referred out of country to the United States.

Mr. Speaker, what we try and do in this province is make sure that we have the services here to facilitate our own citizens' treatment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Madam Minister, Robert Hammermeister, is a 75-year-old man from Frobisher who has lived and paid taxes in Saskatchewan his entire life

Last fall, Mr. Hammermeister was diagnosed in Saskatchewan with a pituitary tumour in his brain. He was then put on a long waiting list for an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) to confirm the diagnosis. Mr. Hammermeister was extremely concerned about his medical condition and the unreasonably long waiting time to get an MRI in Saskatchewan. So, Mr. Speaker, he decided to pay \$1,600 to have the MRI done immediately in Minot.

Mr. Speaker, the MRI confirmed the diagnosis of a brain tumour that could have left him blind or dead without surgery. Faced with the longest surgical waiting lists in Canada, Mr. Hammermeister chose to have the surgery done at the Mayo Clinic at his own expense of \$41,000.

Mr. Speaker, now the NDP's health system is refusing to give him a follow-up MRI. Why, Madam Minister, is that the NDP's position? Threaten a patient's life or health with the longest

waiting lists in the country and then deny him follow-up care when they return to the province after their initial treatment?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do understand why the Saskatchewan Party likes to indicate longest waiting lists in Canada when there is no evidence to suggest that. And I think, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the discussion and the public discourse that needs to go on in this province around health, it is important that everyone give factual information. And that's what I'm going to try and do as the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, when people go out of country to receive their health services and do not have prior approval, the policy of the Department of Health is that those treatments will be paid by the individual.

Mr. Speaker, I am also aware of cases where someone close to the North Dakota border went south for some diagnosis. It was determined that that person required an operation and that person was sent to Regina and received their operation on an emergency basis.

Mr. Speaker, if people have the information and the treatment is available in Saskatchewan, people receive the treatment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — I have a letter from the surgeon at the Mayo Clinic that says, and I quote:

A repeat MRI scan is of critical importance. If these scans are not performed, the tumor could regrow.

Mr. Speaker, the surgeon also advises that, quote:

Mr. Hammermeister has tried going through official channels in the Canadian health system to obtain a post-operative MRI scan and has been told that this would not be done for him.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP didn't tell Mr. Hammermeister that he would have to wait for a while to get what the doctor described as a critical MRI. No, the NDP government said he couldn't have an MRI at all in Saskatchewan. Why? Well because he didn't get his original treatment in Saskatchewan.

Madam Minister, is that your NDP's government policy? Put a patient with serious health problems on the longest waiting list in Canada and then deny them follow-up treatment if they choose to seek treatment elsewhere.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as the member will know, it is illegal for the Minister of Health to comment about any individual case. It is contrary to the information and privacy Act. And in fact when ministers of Health in other parts of this country have commented on individual cases, they have had to leave their position as Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that I am prepared to look into the specific details of this particular case. I can indicate to the

people of this province that there are over 5,000 people each year that receive an MRI in the province of Saskatchewan, and we also have follow-up treatment when people are sent out of province or out of country.

Mr. Speaker, I will indicate to the member that I will for sure look into this case to make sure that he is not exaggerating or misrepresenting the facts of this case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our facts are accurate, unlike the previous opposition before 1991.

Mr. Speaker, another question to the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, it was your failed health system that caused this problem. It's the NDP's two-tiered health system that is causing great pain for thousands of people in Saskatchewan.

Robert Hammermeister was forced to seek medical assistance outside of Saskatchewan because he was afraid that waiting for service here could leave him blind or worse. A burst brain tumour could have killed him.

Madam Minister, your NDP government forced Mr. Hammermeister to seek treatment outside of Saskatchewan, then refused the follow-up treatment. You have committed today to look into Mr. Hammermeister's case. Will you also compensate him for any cost associated with follow-up medical treatment that he is forced to take outside of Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, what I can indicate to the member is that if that treatment is available in the province of Saskatchewan and if it's appropriate treatment, what I can assure the member is that that treatment will be available in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Grain Handlers' Strike

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture or his designate.

Mr. Minister, for two months rotating strikes by 70 west coast grain handlers has been backing up shipments of western grain. Mr. Speaker, those 70 strikers have already caused the loss of at least \$9 million dollars worth of grain sales for Saskatchewan farmers, and further transportation delays have the potential to cost farmers a million more in lost sales and demurrage charges.

Last week the NDP government refused to debate the need for back-to-work legislation and now the federal NDP and Reform parties are holding up legislation in Ottawa.

Mr. Speaker, this situation is totally unacceptable. Following question period today, the Saskatchewan Party will be again moving for an emergency motion calling on the federal political parties, all political federal parties, to co-operate the immediate passage of back-to-work legislation. Mr. Minister, will you and your government, your NDP government, stand up for Saskatchewan farmers in supporting this motion?

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite and I want to quote from *Hansard* of March 17 when the Premier dealt with this issue, and the member I think was here in the House but he said, and I quote:

... we want this strike to be completed and the blockage, the stoppage, ceased as quickly as possible.

He goes on to say this should be:

... settled and settled quickly, and if not, legislation should be considered because the economy of Saskatchewan demands it.

Now what surprises most Canadians is the report in *The Toronto Star* on Saturday and I quote:

Boudria sought Commons consent to have the MPs deal with all stages of the Bill in a single day, but to his surprise, the western-based Reform Party balked.

Now better than debating here in the House, maybe your leader ... maybe your leader, Mr. Hermanson, the former Reformer, the former Reformer, would get on the phone and phone his colleague and see if he couldn't unblock the Reformers in Ottawa and get on with the legislation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Deputy Premier, it just so happens ...

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

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Deputy Premier, for your information we have contacted every federal party to get on board, support this legislation, including your federal party, including the Reform Party, and every other party down there. So we aren't playing favourites. You contact your federal party and ask them to get on board.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has written, as I said, to all parties in the federal system and we're asking quite simply the same question. We're asking for an emergency debate following question period, and what we're asking you to do is allow this debate so all parties can take part, put pressure on all federal parties and the federal government. This problem cannot continue. Will you support our motion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, for the last three or four days we've been debating the Throne Speech. And I've listened to many of the speeches and I have not heard members opposite, who have opportunity to speak whenever they want on this issue, talk about it in any detail at all. They don't even speak about it.

But today, grandstanding in question period, grandstanding in question period, they now want to, they now want to get some press.

Well let me tell you what might work. If Elwin Hermanson would get on the phone: "Hello, Preston. Hello, Preston. How are you today? This is Elwin Hermanson, your former colleague. Do you think you want to pass this legislation?" That's what you should do.

Where is Mr. Hermanson today? Get him on the phone. Get him on the phone, phone Preston Manning, and let's see if we can get this legislation unblocked.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Retail Sales Record

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Minister, Statistics Canada released another set of figures this morning and once again Saskatchewan is dead last. This time it's retail sales. From January 1998 to January 1999 retail sales in Saskatchewan fell by 5 per cent — 5 per cent, Mr. Minister. That's your record. It's the worst record of all in Canada.

Mr. Minister, the NDP has the worst job creation record in the country and now you have the worst sales record in the country. That's the record. Dead last again and again and again. Mr. Minister, will you admit that high taxes are crippling our economy?

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, I was momentarily distracted signing a cheque for \$2 million, which is the amount we pay daily in interest on the debt left behind when those people left office, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm not sure why the member is on his high horse. But what I'm going to tell the member is this, Mr. Speaker, that between 1992 and 1997 Saskatchewan led Canada in terms of economic growth, Mr. Speaker. And in terms of retail sales, we've had really amazing growth in retail sales since we came to office in 1991.

And it's true, Mr. Speaker, that this year our economy is going to grow slower than it has in previous years. But that's because we've been hit hard on the farm and hit hard in oil, Mr. Speaker. But we're still growing, which is a far cry from what occurred in the 1980s when the hon. members over there were in office, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Communications Budget in Department of Health

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, the week before the Throne Speech, the Premier was explaining to reporters the mistakes that his government had admitted making in health care. The mistake that the Premier admitted to was his failure at consulting and communicating their plans to the people of Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I find that hard to believe that communications would be a problem in health care. You see, Mr. Speaker, according to a freedom of information document

obtained by the Liberal caucus, the Saskatchewan health communications branch saw a 340 per cent increase in their total labour and operating expenses budget from 1992 to 1998, and a 356 per cent increase in the communications labour budget for the same period. In just six years — zap — a 356 per cent increase for flacks and more communications propaganda. Zap — more flack; and zap — more propaganda.

Can the Minister of Health stand up in this House today and justify those horrendous increases?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, this morning we had the opportunity — the Associate Minister of Health and myself — to meet with the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* editorial board, and one of the discussions we had was their observation that we needed to provide much more information to the people of this province about health care in this province.

Mr. Speaker, last week in this House in answer to questions, I began to start to provide the many myriad of services that the people of this province have: for instance, 4,600,000 visits to a physician each year in the province of Saskatchewan; for instance, 28,000 people in this province receiving home care services. That helps people stay in their own homes; it helps people recover from day surgery.

Mr. Speaker, we have 200 people in this province that receive Betaseron; 43,000 radiation and chemotherapy treatments each year. Mr. Speaker, we are spending \$1.732 billion each year in the province of Saskatchewan and we're going to tell people what that gets the people of the province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Well I thank the minister for all those flowery statistics, Mr. Speaker. But I'm wondering if the minister realizes that the increased costs of her communications branch would, in fact, pay for 15 new nurses or 84 hip replacements; 3,200 cataract surgeries; 8,300 mammograms; 3,000 MRI scans or 6,800 CT (computerized tomography) scans, besides another 26 kidney transplants per year.

It's a question of priorities, Mr. Speaker. Priorities is the question here, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain why it's a priority to increase the propaganda department by 340 per cent, when there are long lines for diagnostic treatment here in Saskatchewan?

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important that people do know what sorts of services that are available in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, you know we now have palliative care for people who are in the process of passing away and they can receive that service in their own home.

Mr. Speaker, we now provide drugs free of cost for people who are receiving palliative care in their own homes and, Mr. Speaker, 2,500 people receive that kind of care in their homes.

And I think it's important that people know that they don't have to go to the hospital if they want to be in their own homes with the support of home care as they live out their remaining days.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that people who have multiple sclerosis know the kind of drugs that are available in this province, so that they can try and continue to live independent lives. That's important and people need to know that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that people in this province know you don't have to go to Saskatoon and Regina to get your chemotherapy. You can get your chemotherapy in Humboldt, and Kerrobert, and Outlook, and Edam, and Lloydminster, and Rosetown, and Melfort, and Nipawin, and Meadow Lake.

Mr. Speaker, people need to know what they can get. And, Mr. Speaker, we think that's extremely important.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nursing Shortage

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a few years back when the associate Health minister was the vice-chair of the province's Health Human Resource Committee, she was telling the province about the impending nursing shortage. Mr. Speaker, can the associate Health minister tell us in plain language when she told the Premier and the Health minister about the nursing shortage?

Can she tell us when and if she sat down with the Minister of Health to warn her of the impending nursing shortage or not.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing in Health human resources is looking at a long-term plan for this province that not only deals with what nurses we'll need, what doctors we need, what LPNs (licensed practical nurse) we'll need, what licensed practical nurses, what therapists we'll need. We're looking at a sustainable long-term plan that covers our needs into the future as well as now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well that answer has been as vague as everyone else, that other ministers are answering here.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health when she became aware of the nursing shortage in Saskatchewan. In an article written January 29 of this year the minister was quoted in the *Leader-Post* as saying that she was not aware of the problem of the nursing shortage and that she was caught off guard. How come she was caught off guard?

When you are in charge of an almost \$2 billion organization, don't you think it's important to know the key parts of that organization and operation, Madam Minister? That's part of the internal communication process. It would be like a hockey team starting the season with only three players. Don't you think that maybe, just maybe, you should have known about this problem

in advance?

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is this: do you not agree that it was a failure on your part and the Premier's part to not know about this nursing shortage in advance?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, very much for the question, for the member from Wood River.

Mr. Speaker, each year in the province of Saskatchewan, the Department of Health undergoes what is called a health employers' survey. And, Mr. Speaker, in the 1997 health employers' survey, there was an indication that there were 52 vacant positions in the province out of 5,560.1 full-time equivalent nursing positions. Mr. Speaker, the vacancy rate was .7 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that all provinces in this country as well as various jurisdictions in North America and across the globe are experiencing not only a shortage in nursing but also a shortage in a number of different professions, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the member is that we are working very closely with the SRNA (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association), with the University, with SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), and with the department in order to develop an ongoing nursing recruitment and retention strategy, but for also other health care providers as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Social Service Caseloads

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Social Services. Mr. Minister, Social Services employees demonstrated last week in front of government offices across the province. They are angry and frustrated because the NDP government doesn't seem to get it.

It's the same story no matter where you look. Nurses and social workers crushed under the weight of a massive and growing workload, and an NDP government that is more concerned about politics than people.

It's ridiculous, Mr. Minister. Child protection workers with caseloads of more than 45. Foster care workers with caseloads of more than 50. Young offenders' workers, caseloads of more than 65. Income security workers, caseloads of more than 300. Mr. Speaker, with caseloads like this, superwoman herself could not get the job done.

Mr. Minister, Social Services caseworkers need some help. What is the NDP government doing to address these dangerously high caseloads?

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. The question of child protection caseloads is one of concern to the government. It is for that reason that the government acted during the course of the last

year to add significant new staff in the area of child protection so as to reduce the caseloads in that area.

Coupled with that, we have also sought to expand training opportunities for our staff so that they're in a better position to discharge the very difficult jobs that they do in our province.

Mr. Speaker, what I didn't get . . . We know what the union's position is, which is to add even more staff at this point and also to make staff commitments binding on the government and on the members of the Legislative Assembly. Our position is that we will continue to monitor it. We are very concerned about this.

What we didn't hear though, Mr. Speaker, is what is the position that party, given that their position is to freeze staffing levels and to freeze expenditures in the area of Social Services. We really need to get beyond hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker. We need sort of some clear answers from that group opposite.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 7 — The Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 7, The Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 8 — The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 8, The Assessment Management Agency Amendment Act, 1999, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 10 — The Boiler and Pressure Vessel Act, 1999

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 10, The Boiler and Pressure Vessel Act, 1999, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 12 — The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 12, The Northern Municipalities Amendment Act, 1999, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 13 — The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 13, The Rural Municipality Amendment Act, 1999, be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Bill No. 14 — The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1999

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 14, The Urban Municipality Amendment Act, 1999 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to rule 46 to ask leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity.

The Speaker: — The hon. member for Saltcoats requests to introduce through rule 46 a motion of urgent and pressing necessity and to set aside the normal business of the House.

I'll ask the hon. member to very briefly describe why he believes the matter is one which justifies setting aside the normal business of the House and to also advise the House very briefly of the motion he wishes to introduce.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Back to Work Legislation for Striking Grain Handlers

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our motion today is very similar to the one that we put forth last week. I think at this point though it's a necessity because of federal . . . all parties federally seem to be . . . There seems to be a holdup to this legislation. And I think what we need in this House is that we have a coming together of all parties to show them the need for this legislation to be passed very quickly.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Moosomin:

That this Assembly calls on all the federal political parties to pass back to work legislation for striking grain handlers on the west coast port immediately.

The Speaker: — It's not in order for the hon. member to move the motion because that is not acceptable yet. But at this point the hon. member has advised the House as to why he wishes to have the House set aside its normal course of business and the nature of the motion which is introduced. Leave is required. Is leave granted?

Leave not granted.

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Stanger: — Thank you. It's not very often we get someone from our constituency of Lloydminster here because it's such a long way. I'd like to introduce a constituent of mine, a person who has worked very hard in the Sask Wheat Pool area, also on the Lakeland Regional College Board — a constituent who works very hard for his community. And I'm proud to introduce Jim Metherell from Lashburn. Stand, take a bow, Jim.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great humility that I rise to address the hon. members assembled here today.

Mr. Speaker, all of us are fortunate to have been given this opportunity to represent our constituents in this esteemed House. Few are chosen to serve their fellow citizens in this unique manner. At times we may forget that we are servants of the people of our constituency, but also of the people of this wonderful province which has been truly blessed with natural resources, dedicated people, and riches beyond our fondest dreams. Mr. Speaker, it is good that we reflect, if ever so briefly, on our boundless blessings.

Mr. Speaker, you have received many accolades — not only from members in this legislature, but from the public at large with regard to your program of informing and educating various groups on the importance of participation in democracy — accolades which are rightly deserved.

Mr. Speaker, I am impressed by your wisdom, your fairness — almost to a fault at times — and your devotion to the decorum and operation of this legislature.

But, Mr. Speaker, before your cranium becomes so swollen as to distort the shape of the tricorne which sits upon your round head, the same is not true in your culinary tastes. Really, Mr. Speaker, fast food services for an evening out?

Mr. Speaker, it's good to be back.

Mr. Speaker, the people of the Swift Current constituency are truly an inventive, energetic, and diverse group. It has a diversity as varied as the weather. We have a strong Scandinavian contingent north of Swift Current. The city itself is a true mosaic of many nationalities. And in the south we have a large number of Mennonites who came and settled the area originally known as the Mennonite reserve. The people have

prospered very well in this constituency.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture and oil industry play a vital role in this constituency. However, manufacturing, construction, and the service industries are also very important.

Mr. Speaker, this area experienced full employment during '97 and '98. Because of depressed commodity prices, this is no longer true at this time.

Mr. Speaker, building reached a record high in '98 and all indications suggest that '99 will be the same. I had the opportunity of talking to the owner of a small construction company who was so proud that he was able to keep his crew all winter working and that he has enough work planned till September with various other projects on the side.

And so we have manufacturers of agricultural implements, metal siding, oil field equipment, and all types of energetic people working in this region.

Mr. Speaker, the constituency also has many fine recreational facilities. Swift Current will boast of two first-class 18-hole golf courses in the near future. A new extension to the Fairview Arena has now given the city three artificial, indoor ice surfaces for the people.

Shared services, a unique of combination of city, school boards, and health boards, are working together to establish a fine arts facility.

The people of Swift Current are proud of the fact that they were an integral part of health region no. 1 which introduced medicare to the province and eventually to Canada. Mr. Speaker, we helped introduce medicare to Canada and we will do all in our power to maintain universal free health care despite the efforts of the Tories and the Liberals to introduce a two-tier American-style health system.

Mr. Speaker, you and I perhaps are the only members in this Assembly who remember a famous boxer named Kid McCoy, and I'm not even sure that you remember it. But I do. The Statler Brothers have immortalized the Kid in a song which they called "The Kid's Last Fight."

Mr. Speaker, the Kid was in a bar one night when a slightly inebriated individual began to harass him. The Kid told the man who he was: hey, I'm a professional boxer. Lay off. The Kid stated that he did not want to harm him. The man persisted and actually took a swing at him. The Kid ducked and landed a punch on the man's jaw and knocked him down. The man grabbed his jaw, moved it back and forth a few times, and then announced to all and sundry that was the real McCoy. And so a new phrase was entered into the English language.

Mr. Speaker, what a knock out: the Speech from the Throne — the real McCoy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Mr. Wall: — An outline that offers common sense, reality and

hope to the people of this great province. Mr. Speaker, hope for the young, assurances for those needing medical attention, common sense economic development for the business and the workers, fiscal prudence for the taxpayer. In short, the real McCoy which has sent the opposition members reeling in their corners.

Mr. Speaker, one of the first steps which was mentioned in the Speech from Throne is job creation and continued growth. Mr. Speaker, despite the naysaying opposition, more people are working in good, full-time jobs in Saskatchewan today than ever before. In fact, a recent Alberta study ranks Saskatchewan number one in youth employment for three years running. We are also building partnerships with northern and Aboriginal communities to open the door for full participation in our economy.

Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to work with business and the co-operative community to create jobs, to promote investments in diversification, to reduce the costs of doing business in this province and to expand trade and tourism. In short, this government is committed to job creation, economic development and a balanced approach, debt reduction, tax cuts, and enhanced services such as health and education.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is coming off five years of solid economic growth where it led the nation. The February 1999 job numbers reflect a slight slowing down of this economy that has been performing so strongly, where more people are working, as I mentioned before, than at any time in the province's history, and more people working at full-time jobs than ever before.

The province has also seen two years of record capital investment expenditures by public and private organizations. Statistics Canada figures show that Saskatchewan's investment expenditures of 7.1 billion in 1997 were an all-time high and last year's number of 6.5 billion was the second highest level ever reported for the province. Saskatchewan's projected capital investment of 5.7 billion in 1999 will be the third highest level of spending in the province's history and will be more than 1 billion higher than the level projected for Manitoba in 1999.

It should also be noted that Statistics Canada established these projections in the survey conducted in the wake of last year's market turbulence, and the figures could turn out to be even more positive.

Mr. Speaker, mention was made in the speech with regard to this government's firm commitment to medicare. While this Romanow government continues with improvements to health delivery, opposition members preach doom and gloom about the crisis in medicare. Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne emphasized that this government, under the leadership of Premier Romanow, is committed to a strong, sustainable health system and that we will defend the Canada Health Act with its five principles of: portability, access, comprehensive coverage, non-profit public administration.

Mr. Speaker, we are bound and determined that we will do this. As you know health care is a very important issue for our government. Although we have gone through challenges and

many changes in the past years, health care remains at the top of our agenda.

What is the real story about health care in Saskatchewan? Health care reform means we are doing more for people. The provincial government increased health care spending to make up for the federal cutbacks which were drastic. Because we are doing so much more, we are spending more money.

I am really pleased to see the federal government begin to replace some of the money they have cut from health care. It's a step in the right direction, and with this extra money we are going to target some of the key issues which are facing health care. Issues like: waiting lists, cancer care, women's health, and better working conditions for the health providers. The federal government is only replacing some of the money it has cut, but it will still help us improve our services.

Mr. Speaker, just a few statistics to indicate the state of health care in Saskatchewan. There was an 18 per cent increase in surgeries; in other words, a total of 91,773 surgeries were performed last year. That's a large amount. An 80 per cent increase in cataract surgeries, a total of 10,500 cataract surgeries. A 30 per cent increase in hip and knee surgeries, a total of 1,850. One hundred and nine per cent increase in angioplasties, which is of course coronary surgery, a total of 899.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how many of you people saw the television coverage where they mentioned that the waiting list for angioplasty is no longer in existence. With the modern equipment and the staffing which they have at the General Hospital in Regina and what they have in Saskatoon, this waiting list is going to disappear. And so we are very, very happy and proud of that.

During all this time we hear from the opposition that we only put in enough money to cover the cost of living increase. Well there was a 14.5 increase in provincial government spending on health care. That's a little bit more than the cost of living increase, if I know my mathematics a little bit.

Mr. Speaker, just a few statistics that I've mentioned about the increase in health services for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when one reads the headlines or listens to the rhetoric of the members opposite, especially the leader of rhetoric, innuendoes, and fearmongering, one would think the health system was in complete disarray. Mr. Speaker, here is what the people are really saying.

People who have been patients or made use of the health system . . . 91 per cent rate it as excellent or good. Mr. Speaker, I would like to personally say that I couldn't have received better care at any time in my recent stay in the hospital. And I'm sure that the member from Rosthern would be prepared to also state the same facts.

In the general public, according to an omnibus poll conducted in November of '98, 75 per cent of the people rated it as excellent or good. This is a health system that is in disarray? This is a health system that is in crisis?

Mr. Speaker, in spite of the general attitude of the public, 95 per cent of the media reports on health care are negative. And believe it or not, 100 per cent of the Tories' expression on health care are negative.

An Hon. Member: — Negative.

Mr. Wall: — Negative — no good things to say about a health system which is the envy of the rest of Canada. Mr. Speaker, a clear example of fearmongering carried out by the Tories opposite.

Mr. Speaker, as I already mentioned . . . mention was made in the speech about the contribution Health Region One made in pioneering medicare in the province. I'm proud to represent those people who continue to be innovative and creative in dealing with issues that do arise.

Mr. Speaker, a good example of this occurred only last year. The Swift Current Health District was facing a shortage of doctors and so a public meeting was called to discuss this issue. They made it clear at the beginning that this was not a meeting to point fingers. This was not a meeting to assign blame. It was an open discussion to be held and several suggestions were made.

Well, Mr. Speaker, up to the microphone strode the member for Moosomin and proclaimed to everyone there that he was the Health critic for the Tories. Mr. Speaker, to the embarrassment of all present and to the member, the Health critic for the Tories ranted that Swift Current would lose its status as a regional hospital and that the government was to blame.

Mr. Speaker, doom and gloom, divisive tactics, half-truths. The people would have nothing to do with this fearmongering and they dismissed his out-of-hand claims and proceeded to solve the problem.

Mr. Speaker, since then the Swift Current Health District is fully staffed, is making plans for regeneration of the hospital, and will have a balanced budget for the coming year. Perhaps we should invite the critic more often as a catalyst for making improvements.

Mr. Speaker, then out of the woodwork — sorry, I didn't mean out of the woodwork. From out of Wood River the member arrived in Swift Current and announced to all and sundry that he was here to promote and — guess what — demand that the Swift Current Health District install a CAT scan and establish a renal dialysis unit. Mr. Speaker, unbeknownst to this champion of medicare, this knight in rusty armour, who favours a two-tier American-style health system, the board had both issues already under advisement and were in the process of preparing presentation.

Mr. Speaker, the shared services meeting that I attended on Friday and, of which I am going to be a full-time member, discuss the CAT scan, discuss the renal analysis . . . dialysis unit. And together this shared services group is presenting their findings and so forth to the Department of Health. This is the way that you solve problems — co-operatively and in a shared way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Then, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Tories, Mr. Hermanson, true to form, announced just the other day: we want to increase public awareness that the NDP may have some sinister plans for health care in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, notice the use of may. Fearmongering, divisive tactics, based on innuendo, half-truths, and suppositions. Mr. Hermanson is going to gallop around the countryside spreading rumours, innuendoes, and half-truths about hospital closures in rural Saskatchewan.

When the Minister of Health was invited to attend, she stated, "We have no plan to close rural hospitals and I'm not interested in being part of a fear campaign by a bunch of opposition politicians who are trying to get themselves elected in the next political election."

Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan know who introduced medicare first to southwest Saskatchewan, then to this province, and eventually to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we also remember those who oppose medicare, those who worked against universality, and those who would introduce two-tiered American-style health care in a flash. And who would profit from this American style medicare? The big corporations who are waiting expectantly to pounce on an unsuspecting public.

Mr. Speaker, not only New Democrats but the people of Saskatchewan will fight this invasion with all their resources available, and our health system will continue to be the best in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Tory health care policy really all about? Some of you have perhaps heard of the saying, "money audit." Well their value-for-money audit really means that control over the health system will become the job of accountants and not health care professionals and the local boards. The value-for-money audit is the only way they can come up with any new health care money.

By auditing the work of front-line caregivers and their support networks, the Tories hope they will find the money for all their other health promises. Remember their plans for health, and education for that matter, are to increase the budget by only the amount of inflation.

So where will we get they money for new equipment? Where will we get the resources for new nurses? Where will they get the money for contract settlements? Where will they get the resources to hire new doctors? Where will they get the money to enhance services? Where would we be today if they were governing during the massive federal health off-loading? These are just a few of the questions which one should ask.

Mr. Speaker, I've always believed that education is so vital for any individual, group, or society. Universal, free education provides the means by which individuals can improve and become productive individuals in our society.

Mr. Speaker, our education system is in a state of flux, and

more and more responsibility is being placed on the educational system to deal with many expectations of society.

(1445)

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am proud of our government action to continue funding education as a prime priority. And that a task force will be established to look at the role of schools in this present day. Mr. Speaker, all the stakeholders — parents, students, trustees, teachers, administration, the general public — will have an opportunity to express their viewpoints, their concerns, their hopes for the future of education.

Mr. Speaker, an open public discussion to arrive at betterment of the educational system so that our students will receive the best educational program available. Mr. Speaker, an ambitious and worthy endeavour, what better way to provide our citizens with the tools for living, than to provide the best education possible.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition Tory Party, sometimes referred to as the Saskatchewan Party also has a platform for education. Mr. Speaker, they have stated publicly and ensured it in their platform that a freeze except for the cost-of-living increase will be placed on education for five years.

Mr. Speaker, the former president of the trustees association, a former Liberal, a former defender of public education, now sitting as a member of the Tory Party, must certainly feel proud of the stand his so-called new party has taken on education. Mr. Speaker, an absolute freeze, other than the cost-of-living increase on educational spending for five years. Disgraceful, repugnant and deplorable — deplorable.

This government wants to ensure that children get the best possible start, can learn in a safe and healthy school, and have broader access to technology. The school as a social, cultural, educational centre for the community will be examined in the role of the schools' task force also announced in the Throne Speech.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I'm positive that this government will do all that it's empowered to ensure that the people of this . . . that the children and the adults of this great province will receive the education which is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to digress a little bit this time, and I'm going to take a few moments and express a few thoughts about taxation. And a lot of these are my own personal feelings, and so I'll have to live with them.

Mr. Speaker, whenever taxes are mentioned by Tories, Liberals, the taxpayers' association, the Fraser Institute, and other right-leaning individuals, it is as though the word tax is a dirty word. Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be wonderful if we had universal free education; universal free medicare; excellent roads; clean drinking water; pollution-free atmosphere; good public and private transportation; safe, secure communities; and no taxes. Mr. Speaker, it sounds like Utopia.

Well, Mr. Speaker — and this actually happened — a Mennonite farmer called on me the other day in my office. Mennonites, by the way, are noted for their concern of their

fellow man, are also known for their deep religious convictions, and are also known for their frugal ways. They keep their money close to the vest. That is an understatement.

Well, Mr. Speaker, he wanted to talk taxes. I was prepared for the onslaught. He started. You know, he says, my rate of income tax is about 50 per cent. Well I knew he was reasonably well off and so I agreed with him. I pay a lot of property tax for my modest home. Well again I agreed with him, except that I think that he had more than just a modest home.

Then I have to pay 7 per cent GST (goods and services tax) and 7 per cent PST (provincial sales tax) on many of my purchases. I quickly reminded him that we had changed from 9 to 7, and that we charge PST on a much smaller base than other jurisdictions. He just waved that off. So altogether, he says, I pay a lot of taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I was about to interrupt and expound with great wisdom on the taxation issue when he silenced me with a glare and continued. You know, he stated, I went on a cruise last winter, and one of our stops was an island nation which has no taxes. None whatsoever. They also had no roads, no safe drinking water, no schools, no modern transportation, poor housing for the majority of the people, abject poverty everywhere.

You know he concluded, I'm glad I live in Saskatchewan and I'm glad I enjoy a comfortable life. It would be nice if my taxes were lower but I'm not going to complain.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Well when I finally lifted my chin from my chest, I realized that there are many things we take for granted in this great province of ours. Mr. Speaker, taxes are a means by which we can ensure that education will be available for all, not just the rich and powerful. Medical care will be there when needed. Money will not determine your place in the line. Safe, secure communities will be provided and a reasonable standard of living will be enjoyed by the majority of citizens.

And I thought, Mr. Speaker, I thought this was an isolated case but I'm not so sure anymore. Mr. Speaker, a headline in the national news on Tuesday, March 16, read: "Canadians are losing interest in tax cuts." Well, as you know, sometimes headlines are misleading so I thought I'd better read the whole article.

The article goes on to say that Ottawa's Ekos Research show 91 per cent favoured increased health care; 83 per cent of Canadians said that productivity should be a high priority. And here was the statistic: 64 per cent, down from 75 per cent only a few months before, supported tax cuts. In other words, there were fewer people who were supporting tax cuts; 54 per cent felt there had already been too many cuts to social programs.

Mr. Speaker, the findings suggest that for a tax cutting agenda to succeed it had better get beyond the trade-off of social programs versus tax cuts. Mr. Speaker, all of us would like to see lower taxes but, before we forget, let us at least look at the consequences.

Mr. Speaker, it's a sad commentary on our political system when a government must contemplate introducing legislation to cover an issue which common sense, dignity, and honour should dictate. Mr. Speaker, I refer to the legislation which will require any member of this legislature who changes political allegiance during his or her tenure to resign from the legislature and allow the constituents to determine, in a by-election, whether they agree or disagree with the member's action.

Mr. Speaker, it sounds simple and straightforward to me. It must have sounded straightforward to the member from Athabasca also because that's what he did. He resigned, sought the nomination, and then of course fought in an election. But I guess this doesn't appeal to the Tory and Liberal members opposite who now form the so-called Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, those members opposite have been falsely representing their constituents for over a year now at the expense of the Saskatchewan taxpayer. Then on top of all that they had the unmitigated gall to request official status as the opposition and receive still more public funds.

Mr. Speaker, is there no end to their lust for power, their over-consuming zeal to gain power at any cost?

Of course the reason for not seeking vindication by the voters of their questionable tactics, as they stated, was the lack of a platform or a leader. Mr. Speaker, how could anyone, especially the former Liberals, accept the snow job performed by the Tories. No platform, no leader, no conscience, and then loudly proclaim their acceptance of this merger is beyond my comprehension. Why would they forsake their principles, their beliefs, their commitments to their constituents, to join a group whose sole purpose was power?

Mr. Speaker, the member from Humboldt took a long time to decide her allegiance to the Tories. When she did finally decide, a platform was in place, a leader had been elected, and she never offered to resign, run in a by-election, and give her constituents an opportunity to endorse or not endorse her actions. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a sad commentary that this government must contemplate introducing legislation to protect constituents from this type of action.

Mr. Speaker, on March 15, 1999, Elwin Hermanson, now the proud leader of this group of people, made an interesting observation. It particularly affects the former Liberal members who now sit with the Conservatives. Mr. Speaker, he claimed that the five Liberals who crossed the floor were not pressured to resign their seats, and we all probably agree with that.

According to Mr. Hermanson though, only the Liberals crossed the floor. The Tories did not abandon their party; they did not double-cross the Conservatives when they took on a new name. Mr. Speaker, the former Liberals must find these statements rather disheartening. The Tories were only taking on a bit of camouflage while the Liberals were abandoning their principles. Mr. Speaker, a sad commentary to say the least.

Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing a lot of rhetoric from the Leader of the Tories. Here truly is a great leader for the motley crew spawned in the darkness of midnight with subterfuge and intrigue as the true characteristics of this band of former

have-beens. Have been champions of equality and justice; now are purveyors of fearmongering and division. Have been guardians of public health; now advocates of American-style health care, where 40 million cannot afford decent health care and the wealthy enjoy the privilege on the backs of the poor, the ill, and the weak. Have been financial gurus . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order, order. Order. Now the hon. member for Swift Current is doing his best to present his remarks in the debate on the response to the Speech from the Throne. And there are a number of other members on both sides of the House who seem to be enthusiastic about getting their remarks into the debate. I'll encourage all members to use the opportunity to put their remarks on the record when their turn arises, and in the meantime to allow the hon. member for Swift Current to continue the debate uninterrupted.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here were the have-been financial gurus who tried demonically, deliberately, to destroy the economy of this great province during the '80s. And, Mr. Speaker, to their discredit, they succeeded to the extent that our children's children will have to carry this burden. There was not one whimper from the member from Moosomin as this was occurring.

These are the ones with a new financial plan, with another vision to bring chaos to this province. Never will the people of this great province forget or forgive these former machinations. This is the group that Mr. Hermanson will lead not out of but into the wilderness of political oblivion.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the Speech from the Throne. It truly reflects the aspiration and hopes of the citizens of this wonderful province — the feeling of hope, fiscal integrity, honour, and a feeling of accomplishment. Mr. Speaker, not the doom and gloom of the members opposite who besmirch the accomplishments of the Saskatchewan people at each and every turn.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment. In fact, I'd be surprised that anyone would support the amendment. But I certainly will support the Throne Speech so ably moved by the member from Redberry Lake and brilliantly seconded by the member from Battleford-Cut Knife.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to enter into the debate on the Throne Speech. I'm very happy to be here and have the opportunity to represent my constituents.

First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend you in to keeping order in the House, and I want to tell you that it's well appreciated by older members that come in here . . . are talking about the respect that they have for the House now. So I want to commend you on that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Also I would like to express my thanks to the Deputy Speaker for his job he's doing in the House. He's

doing a very good job.

I would also like to welcome the pages for their work that's being done by them. Also the Sergeant-at-Arms, I'd like to thank him for another round. I'm sure he'll do a good job.

I would like to also say that . . . glad to be back with my colleagues on this side of the House, as well as the other side. I want to say I'm glad to see them back.

I would like to also wish a couple of my former colleagues, Robert Mitchell and Eddie Tchorzewski, who both moved on to other challenges . . . we're sure that they're new challenges they'll be working for the people of Saskatchewan and Canada.

(1500)

I also would like to say that I know after the next election we will . . . this is the last time we got a colleague from Regina Qu'Appelle that I'm sure we're going to miss when she leaves. Also the member from Regina Northeast who has done so much for the government and done a very good job.

I would like to also welcome the member from Saskatoon Eastview who is here for her first time and I know she is doing a very good job . . .

An Hon. Member: — A very good job today in question period.

Mr. Langford: — You bet — a very good job in question period today, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to welcome the member from Athabasca who showed us how to do the honourable thing by running for the New Democrats in the constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about my constituents for a minute. First of all, about our community. We have now in our community the broadcasting in two different cities, which is Choiceland and Birch Hills, that will be watching the proceedings of the House this time — for the first time.

I'd like to describe to you the new constituency. I believe I did before but I want to do it again, Mr. Speaker.

I have the national park to the north in my constituency, and the RM of Shellbrook, the north part that runs out to Canwood, and also the southwest. Also to the west of me is the Sturgeon Lake Reserve. And south, my constituency runs to Macdowell and St. Louis and Birch Hills, and east towards Kinistino; and also north towards White Fox. We take in a couple of parks too as well, provincial parks.

I have five reserves, Mr. Speaker. That is Sturgeon Lake, Wahpeton, Little Red Reserve, Muskoday, and James Smith.

The constituency is made up of a number of different resources. Of course I mentioned before the national park which is probably one of the best parks throughout Canada, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of lakes there. There's fishing, boating, cross-country skiing, camping as well.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of saw mills from small saw mills to large operators throughout the whole forest fringe. And a number of jobs that are created by these small saw mills.

We also have a pulp mill, post treating plants, shakes and shingles, as well as we have a huge agriculture base. There's lots of diversification as well. Specialty crops, canola, peas, flax, milling oats, malting barley, canary seed, mustard seed, red clover — that's just part of some of the specialty crops. Also like the member said, we also have a lot of excitement about diamonds happening in that area. We also have feedlots, Mr. Speaker, elk farming, ostriches, bison, hog operators.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very good about the diversified constituency I live in. I want to thank the people in that area for the hard work they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak on some agriculture issues. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I just want to speak a little bit on debate we had on agriculture, on the AIDA (Agriculture Insurance Disaster Assistance) program. We debated quite a bit about who should pay.

I just want to tell you about federal Liberals, what had happened, and also the Tories. We go back to the argument our Agriculture minister made when the federal government asked for a 60/40 split. I want to tell you, I've got a quote here from an article from the *High Plains Journal* in the USA (United States of America). It begins, "Being there for ag":

On Thanksgiving as we give thanks for a rich harvest and plenty of food to go around, we also give thanks that we will live in a country where time and again our fellow citizens come together to lift each other up.

It goes on farther to say:

That is why President Clinton was able to take a strong stand on behalf of the nation's farm families holding out for a relief package that would make a difference in the lives of farmers and ranchers, who face severe hardship because of the current farm crisis.

Mr. Speaker, it shows that the federal government in the USA, President Clinton, gave to farmers there \$7 billion for the disaster program. Seven billion, Mr. Speaker. That is why a province like Saskatchewan can't compete with the federal American treasuries and the Europeans. We here in Saskatchewan . . . or in the USA, you don't hear of North Dakota or South Dakota trying to put out the money for agriculture or federal agriculture problems, it's the federal government doing it.

An Hon. Member: — Thanks to Elwin Hermanson, not here.

Mr. Langford: — Right.

An Hon. Member: — Thanks a lot, Elwin.

Mr. Langford: — Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say, quote:

The relief package is a reminder that, as a nation, we are in this together, when people who produce our food hit rough

times beyond their control, we will be in there for them as they are there for us, working day in and day out to provide us with our rich agricultural (products) . . .

So, Mr. Speaker, it shows that the Americans do think a lot more federally, a lot more of their farmers than our federal government does.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I want to just talk for a minute about our highways. Mr. Speaker, we look at our highway system. We've got one of the . . . most highways in all of Canada. We've got enough miles to put end to end to go around the equator four and a half times.

The province has committed 2.5 billion over the next 10 years. The provincial government has committed to completely twinning No. 1 and 16 highways within the next 15 years. If we . . .

An Hon. Member: — All by ourselves.

Mr. Langford: — All by ourselves. If we had the federal government commit some of the money, we could probably do it in half the time.

Mr. Speaker, rail line abandonment is another problem we have in the area. Meath Park to Choiceland, they have lifted the rail. We also see that on the tracks it's running the line now between P.A. (Prince Albert) and Saskatoon, which, thank God, at least they are still operating that line.

The next one that the railroad company is wanting to pull out is the one to Birch Hills. And of course we've been able to stall that. But what we're doing is asking that the railroad companies stall off on abandoning rail lines for a while until such time that the communities and the farmers can see that whether they can take them over or run a short line. So we've asked the federal government to back off.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about the Estey report. Just a brief comment on it. One of the things we kept fighting about was the cap on freight. The Estey report recommends that the freight be removed — and the cap. And we're saying that we need to keep the cap on to show that until such time that it shows that the freight rates will go down. Our argument is the cap should not mean anything to the freight rates if they're going down.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak now a little bit about health care. We have two health centres in my constituency — one in Birch Hills and one in Smeaton. Those two health centres, Mr. Speaker, today give a number of different services, and we need to thank those communities that work so hard at looking at the needs; that they do have need in those areas and they are coming up with a lot of new ideas and a lot of different care that's happening there.

Mr. Speaker, we should really look at what is happening in areas such as Alberta. Let's have a look at it, Mr. Speaker. According to Mr. Black's paper, Mr. Speaker, there is 123 accounts are in arrears. Approximately 370,000 people are not paid up, Mr. Speaker. They owe over \$80 million, and 40 per cent of that, Mr. Speaker, people cannot afford to pay, either

because of income or whatever.

Mr. Speaker, they also now, what they're doing is they've got collecting agencies going out there trying to collect the money, harassing people. Can you imagine that being in Saskatchewan? I couldn't. We care too much for our people.

Mr. Speaker, I've got a couple of things I would like to do is talk about our Crowns. One is the sales of our Crowns, the Cameco shares. If we look back to when in '91, when the Tories and Liberals were trying to force us into selling — you remember that? — and that was they were wanting us to sell shares, Cameco shares for \$14.75 apiece, Mr. Speaker. And guess what? In 1995, we sold them for \$74 a share, Mr. Speaker. They've never been so high since.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the Husky upgrader. Remember the Tories and the Liberals telling us we should sell off the same time that Alberta and the federal government sold off?

An Hon. Member: — What'd they sell it for?

Mr. Langford: — Seven cents on the dollar — 7.5 cents on the dollar, Mr. Speaker. That's what they sold their shares for. Seven point five cents on the dollar.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't listen. And you know what? We gained all our money back plus \$10 million, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1515)

Mr. Langford: — Mr. Speaker, also there's been a study done. The study found — by a firm from Toronto — the study found that SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) insurance is one of the cheapest in . . . is the cheapest in all of Canada here in Saskatchewan.

If you compare our insurances to Toronto and Montreal, their car insurance or their insurance would be \$2,351. That's more than half of what we pay for the same vehicle. And if you look at Calgary, they are 53 per cent higher, Mr. Speaker. So we know that we are on the right track.

I guess in closing, Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to commend the member from Redberry, the member from Redberry for the Throne Speech — I will be supporting the Throne Speech — and also the mover from Battleford-Cut Knife. I want to say what an excellent speech.

An Hon. Member: — Thank you.

Mr. Langford: — You bet. And so I'll be supporting the Throne Speech and I won't be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Estevan constituents to add my support to the Speech from the Throne.

I'm also pleased to welcome you to this session and to

compliment you on your outreach with the young people of this province. And it is my hope as well as yours, I'm sure, that having heard your presentation that they will understand the importance of democracy in this great country.

I also want to welcome the towns of Bienfait and Midale to the parliamentary channel, and I hope that they enjoy the viewing.

The hon. member over there suggested when I rose, Mr. Speaker, that this may be my last speech in this House. I don't seem to have the same faith in that remark as he does and I don't think the people of the Estevan constituency do. But if he happens to be right, Mr. Speaker, I would just say that having stood here and spoken and voted the way I have in this House for my constituents, I certainly have no regrets. And I would be able to sleep very well at night knowing that I wouldn't get up and sleepwalk into the wrong political door some night.

It appears from the question period, Mr. Speaker, that we're in for a healthy session. I want to take this opportunity to welcome the pages to the Chamber, and I'm sure it will only increase their enthusiasm for politics.

I would also like to welcome my new seatmate who through his courage and conviction set a standard for changing parties so high that the opposition members were unable to clear it or even try.

I want to thank my constituents for their support over the past year, and I hope that some of the announcements made relevant to my area will assure them that I'm working on their behalf not only for their benefit, but for the overall good of the province as a whole.

One of the major issues in my constituency last election was the emissions from Boundary dam. And after I was elected it was one of the first issues I raised with the minister of SaskPower, the then member from Prince Albert Northcote. And I was very pleased to be at the announcement last spring with the Environment minister stating that the work would begin this year. And I'm told that it is under way.

This Throne Speech sets the direction that the government will continue to take this province in the new millennium. It will continue to give the people of Saskatchewan the balanced approach of tax reductions, service enhancement, and debt reduction as surpluses allow.

Debt reduction — now there's a topic for you, Mr. Speaker. We've had the challenge to reduce the ratio of debt, the GDP (gross domestic product), from 70 per cent to 40 per cent — and it was not an easy challenge — and also to grow the economy and employment at the same time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition doesn't think this is enough. But they remind me of the small boy who was taking the difference between optimism and pessimism at school. He came to his mother with a half a glass of water and asked if it was half full or half empty. She said, I'm much too busy, son. Go ask your grandmother. So the little boy took the glass to his grandmother and asked her the same question. She looked at the glass and very wisely said, it depends on whether I'm drinking or pouring.

Now the only reason I mention this story, Mr. Speaker, is to help explain the difference between the opposition and the government. Now the government has tried very hard to build the economy of this province and provide better services and reduce the debt. In other words, Mr. Speaker, to try and fill the glass for future generations. And I believe we are slowly getting there.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? The opposition has noticed this. There's a little water in the glass and what do you suppose they want to do with it?

An Hon. Member: — Drink it.

Mr. Ward: — That's right. They want to drink it. They don't care about the children and the grandchildren and the future of this province. All they care about is satisfying their thirst for power — now. And I think this illustrates the difference between us and them, Mr. Speaker. We're the pourers and they're the drinkers.

As I said earlier, there's been a lot of questions about health this session. So maybe we should take one more look at the facts, Mr. Speaker. The first fact is that they — those people over there — planned the expansion of the General and Pasqua hospitals. They committed this province to \$80 million of expenditures. They knew there was no money available to do it, but did they care? No, because they knew they were on the way out and that this government would have to clean up their mess.

And how have we done on health care, Mr. Speaker? Let's look at a few of the facts. How do patients rate the health care system? Ninety-one per cent rate it good or excellent. How does the public rate the health care system? Seventy-five per cent — good or excellent. How does the media report the health care system? Ninety-five per cent negative, Mr. Speaker.

But what have we done? What has happened with surgeries, Mr. Speaker? They're up 18 per cent — 91,773 surgeries performed last year.

Cataract surgeries up 80 per cent — 10,500 performed last year. Hip and knee replacement — 1,850 done last year, an increase of 30 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And angioplasties which now have no waiting list, Mr. Speaker, an increase of 109 per cent.

And there's more, Mr. Speaker, what about our spending? We've increased it 14.5 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, we did all this while unfortunately the federal government decreased their spending by 42 per cent on health care.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know they've asked questions and they say more and more about health care and hospital closures and so I think it's interesting to note what did their leader have to say about hospitals in our province, Mr. Speaker. Well let's have a look at what he said:

We had governments that liked to build monuments; that liked to build hospitals. We probably have more hospitals per capita in our province than anywhere in any other part of Canada.

Elwin Hermanson said this, and he continues:

Unfortunately we now have no money to operate those hospitals. Our priorities were probably wrong; in fact, I'm sure they were wrong.

That's what Elwin Hermanson has to say about hospitals in Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible) . . . I agree, that'd be a good idea Bob. The hon. member thinks they should cut their leader. Of course, it would be nothing new for that group over there to cut a leader, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — So I think overall, Mr. Speaker, dealing with an increased workload, funding reductions, and the fearmongering by the opposition parties, this government and the workers in health care system have done a remarkable job.

I know they say they're telling the truth, not fearmongering; but when they say they were closing rural hospitals, that is fearmongering. And while I'm on this topic, Mr. Speaker, let's just go on to a few more facts.

We now have new health benefits in Saskatchewan. Just recently announced, Saskatchewan Health is investing 2 million in family health service . . . or health benefits this year. After three weeks over 14,500 families have signed up indicating a positive response to this popular initiative, and by the end of the fiscal year family health benefits are expected to help out 23,000 families including 46,000 additional children.

Well, Mr. Speaker, while opposition parties are always expected to give the government of the day a rough ride, the recent attacks on medicare by both the Tories and the Liberals show just how far they will go to put their political gain ahead of the well-being of the province.

People who were around in 1947 and '62 will remember what outrageous attacks and allegations the Liberals and Tories made when hospitalization and later medicare were first introduced. They told anyone who would listen — and this certainly included the media of the day — that the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) had a secret plan to destroy the province. Life and services as were known then would certainly come to an end if the CCF were allowed to change health care.

Obviously none of the attacks made by the Liberals and the Tories in '47 or '62 had any basis in reality, but it didn't matter. They knew that emotions could be stirred and anxiety raised without the aid of facts.

Today the Liberals and the Tories are following in their predecessors' footsteps and have both been announcing to the media that the government will be closing rural hospitals. Where did they get this idea and what do they base it on?

They have created it to get media attention. They know that health care is an important issue on which Saskatchewan people have very, very strong opinions. By claiming that health care is coming to an end, they know they will get media attention and hopefully a few more votes in the process. The opposition is being irresponsible and misleading on their attacks on our health care system.

Our government has no plan to close rural hospitals. The future of hospitals in Saskatchewan is not dependent on their average daily census.

Your NDP government is committed to continually improve health services in both rural and urban Saskatchewan. We will continue to work with communities and district health boards to help them improve services offered at their facilities. Services will be enhanced to meet communities' needs. And local people, not offices in Regina, will determine what those needs are.

Why would the opposition make statements that are not true?

An Hon. Member: — All because they're a bad bunch.

Mr. Ward: — They are. And we are drawing closer to an election. Tories and Liberals have been unable to convince people to support them on their own. So they have not been able to convince people to support them on their own merit so they are now trying to scare people into voting for them by fabricating a bogey monster named health care changes.

By undermining the public's confidence in our health care, the opposition is trying to open the door for private American-style health care which has been their preference all along. Their fondest hope . . . that people will believe medicare is falling apart and so pave the way for the promoters of non-health care.

Don't be fooled. Health care will continue to improve in this province, just as it did in '47 and '62. But also, as in the past, Tories and Liberals will continue to raise the spectre of fear and anxiety over health care if they think it will do them any good politically.

(1530)

Mr. Speaker, there's been some issues raised and part of their platform is about Indian taxation. And I think it's important that we clear up this issue before the next election in both the rural and urban areas. And the people of Saskatchewan know the truth about Indian taxation.

Aboriginal people do pay taxes and here are the unvarnished facts, Mr. Speaker. There are three groups of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan: Metis, non-status Indian, and status or treaty Indians. The Metis and the non-status Indians pay exactly the same taxes as other citizens — no special exemptions. Treaty Indians pay all taxes except in two situations: first, they do not pay the PST for on-reserve or off-reserve purchases — this has been so since the inception of this tax; second, they do not pay either federal or provincial income tax on income earned on the reserve — this is federal law. But status Indians do pay fuel and tobacco taxes on both on-reserve and off-reserve purchases. These taxes are collected at the wholesale level and included in the purchase price. Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada where this is so, Mr. Speaker.

If treaty Indians were forced to pay the E&H (education and health) then the province could become totally responsible for their education and health costs. If we change one part of the current arrangements, we would lose the other, and we'd collect more from fuel and tobacco taxes than we lose in PST

exemptions.

Fifty per cent of treaty Indians live and work off-reserve. They pay the same income and property taxes as everyone. Corporations owned by individual Indians or Indian bands pay provincial corporate taxes.

In short, there is no special tax status for two of the three groups of Aboriginal people. The income tax exemption applies only to a small percentage of the 50 per cent of treaty Indians living on reserves. Any imposed change to the current structure would lose more in financial terms than it would gain. Changes to the current system are being negotiated, Mr. Speaker, not imposed.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard from the opposition parties, the Tories and the Liberals, about income taxes and tax relief and how wonderful Alberta is. And the Alberta myth is, Mr. Speaker, mostly a myth. An example of this myth is that things are better in Alberta than in Saskatchewan. That concept often accepted as fact is more myth actually, Mr. Speaker, than reality. It is not that Alberta is bad; every province, including Alberta, has its attractions. But the knocks against Saskatchewan when compared to Alberta are unjustified.

A common expression are that things are so much cheaper in Alberta because Alberta does not have a provincial sales tax. But it would be equally correct to say that health care is much more expensive in Alberta because everyone there must pay hundreds of dollars in health care premiums each year, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that every family pays over \$800 per year for health premiums in Alberta. The average family in Saskatchewan pays about \$750 in PST. The Alberta advantage of no sales tax is clearly, clearly cancelled out by health premiums.

An Hon. Member: — And a quarter of a million of them have no coverage.

Mr. Ward: — That's right, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member from Regina just points out that the Alberta advantage is that they didn't have Grant Devine for their premier for nine years, and the members opposite should maybe try to remember that.

A further point of comparison that many people refer to is income tax. It is true that a typical family earning 50,000 a year will pay about 1,100 more per year income tax in Saskatchewan. But what is usually not mentioned is that the Alberta family will likely have to pay about \$900 more per year for car insurance.

As far as utilities go, our home heating bills and the cost of our telephones are about the same. We pay almost 200 per year more for electricity but rent is \$1,200 a year less in Saskatoon than it is in Calgary, Mr. Speaker.

Housing prices are of course 30 to 40,000 more in Alberta cities than here making mortgage payments substantially higher there than here.

And let's not forget about our struggling students and their parents. University tuition is 400 to 600 more at Alberta institutes than it is at our fine universities.

So, Mr. Speaker, the next time you hear someone trying to put Saskatchewan down compared to Alberta, you can tell them they're likely only aware of half the story.

And just recently they announced some tax changes in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. What did those people get this year? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. No tax reduction at all. An 11 per cent flat provincial income tax by the year 2002 — that's four years away. They haven't even started to reduce their taxes and we have done that consistently for four years, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Maybe just a note on highways. Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to address, to address their great highway contest. The one they had I think three . . . When they ended it, they had 315 entries or something out of all the people in Saskatchewan. Sure an overwhelming support for their contest.

But it was this letter from Mr. Drew in Carrot River, Mr. Speaker, that I think summed it up very well:

Surely the hands down winner has to be Dr. Grant Devine who had the Saskatchewan people travel down his ideological highway of deceit, deficit and debt.

If my memory serves me correctly this adventure began with the sale of our provincial highway equipment as soon as the Conservative government took office in the 80's. And we wonder why our highways have deteriorated over time.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that sums up the highway contest, the problem with our highways, and it's unfortunate that those members opposite can't remember that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just touch for a minute on some agricultural facts. They're always complaining over there that we don't do enough.

An Hon. Member: — You don't do anything.

Mr. Ward: — We don't do anything. Well the agricultural and Agri-Food Canada farm income financial conditions and government assistance and Statistics Canada census says this, Mr. Speaker: provincial government expenditures in support of the agricultural sector on a per capita basis, '97-98, 1997-1998, Saskatchewan, top of the list — \$309 per capita for our agricultural sector, Mr. Speaker. More than any other province in the country.

Alberta, who they purport to be supporting over there, came second at \$139, Mr. Speaker. That's a far cry from what we do for our agricultural sector in Saskatchewan. And their leader, again, Mr. Speaker, their leader, when he was in the House, once said in a vote . . . here's a headline from *The Western Producer*, Mr. Speaker. It says:

As the committee voted June 18 to approve the departmental spending estimates of 1.8 billion for the current fiscal year, Reform agricultural spokesman, Elwin Hermanson suggested three cuts to the agricultural budget.

To the agricultural budget of Canada, Mr. Speaker. And they purport to be supporting agriculture and their leader is trying to get the money cut . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, that's not what he saying.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to wrap up with a few economic comparisons because I know there's other members that want to speak on this debate. I think that some of the economic comparisons of the prairie provinces is interesting, Mr. Speaker. From '92 to '97, Saskatchewan's personal income grew by 11 per cent, Manitoba by 9, and Alberta's by 9.

We led the three Prairie provinces in personal income growth, Mr. Speaker. The average weekly earnings were 12 per cent; Manitoba, 7 per cent; and between '92 and '98, Saskatchewan's average weekly earnings grew by 14 per cent compared to Alberta's 13 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

And how do women do, Mr. Speaker? How do the women do in the Saskatchewan Party's evaluation of our economic . . . Women in Saskatchewan earned 60 per cent of what men earned in '96. In Manitoba, women earned 64 per cent of what men earned; but in their Utopia of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, their Utopia, 58 per cent of what men earned.

And child poverty, Mr. Speaker, it's just about as deplorable in Alberta as it is in Manitoba. And Saskatchewan leads the three provinces in that, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting to realize how well the Saskatchewan economy is able to weather drops at the price of economies, the wheat price and oil. But we have done enough diversification, Mr. Speaker, that we're able to weather some of these storms. And I think that in the long run the people of Saskatchewan will recognize that, and I hope that eventually, perhaps, Mr. Speaker, even the opposition will recognize that.

You know one other thing about the opposition, Mr. Speaker, just before I sit down. It occurred to me the other day that we have three parties in Saskatchewan. And we have the Saskatchewan Liberal Party that sits over there and we have the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party that sits here. Over there we have the Saskatchewan Party.

Now the other parties have been able to have enough foresight and thought to put a name between Saskatchewan and party and so it becomes the Liberals, the NDPers. But what will happen to them, Mr. Speaker? Are we going to have to call them the partys? Like I have no idea what the short form is going to be for them . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The masquerade party, the hon. member shouts.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I think I've taken about enough time from this Assembly and I will give the other members an opportunity to proceed. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been watching and listening to the debate this afternoon on the Throne Speech and, as a matter of fact, for the last few days since it was read early last week. But I think some of the comments that were made today by members

of the government side really did move me to enter the debate.

And I want to tell you why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think there were two elements that became very, very clear to me as they talked about the past performance of the former administration, the Tories, who now call themselves the Saskatchewan Party.

It told me very much that we need to be very cognizant and very careful about the future of this province; and that the people of Saskatchewan need to continue to be very diligent in terms of the government that they elect and the kind of government that they have come to expect if we're going to continue on the track of sound fiscal management and debt reduction and in general, good government.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about the past before I talk about the future, a future which I think holds a lot of very bright lights for young people in Saskatchewan, for seniors in Saskatchewan, for families of Saskatchewan. We've got a very bright future.

We've got natural resources that are I think unparalleled anywhere in Canada. We've got oil and gas. We've got the finest agricultural land in northern Saskatchewan. We've got minerals in northern Saskatchewan that I and many believe are vastly untapped. So there's an opportunity there for job growth and business growth. We've got a forest industry that's got vast potential to create hundreds of jobs for Saskatchewan people and businesses — new businesses, growing businesses.

But I think, Mr. Speaker, most importantly, what we have here in this province is we have a million people who understand the nature of a good, sound fiscal base for their kids, who are honest and decent hard-working people, who have done a lot to help grow this economy, and who see the future as a place where we can be expanding opportunity.

And that's not to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we're not going to go through some difficult times in Saskatchewan, because we will. We're going through some difficult times right now with the depressed price of oil, with the depressed agricultural prices.

But you know, we've been through that before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a scene that has been replayed. Just the last decade of the 1980s, the mid-1980s, we had similar problems. We had low oil prices; we had depressed agricultural prices; we had drought.

(1545)

And we had governments in the 1980s that tried to manage that. And when I talk about the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's why I think it's really important to talk about the past and to just hearken back to what the Tory government of that administration was not able to achieve.

We had difficult times in the mid-'80s, and we'll grant them that. It's difficult when the commodity prices are low and when you have drought here in Saskatchewan. But that's all the more reason for government then to be more diligent and to be more focused on the future, because the actions of today really are the results that happen down the road in a short, short period to

come.

So after some difficult times in the 1980s, what happened to this province? What happened to us as a people?

Well year after year the Finance minister, the Tory Finance minister under Grant Devine's administration would stand up in this House and talk about a promising future and deliver debt and deliver debt. Fifteen billion dollars of debt they delivered over those periods of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's the future of the 1990s. That's what we inherited from the 1980s.

The number of people, young people, that left this province was staggering — 30,000 people a year.

Deficits and increased debt. And no one will deny that it was a difficult time to govern because of all the things I mentioned — depressed oil prices, agricultural prices, drought. Those were tough times and we'll give them that.

But look at the difference between what's happened in 1990s under a New Democrat administration and that administration of the 1980s. Six balanced budgets, Mr. Deputy Speaker, six in a row, and more to come. A reduction of the debt — not an increase of the debt but a reduction of the debt.

And what's happened with respect to the major expenditures of government? Health care, which is near and dear to all of us and to all of our families — \$1.8 billion spent annually and increasing, in spite of the cut-backs from the federal Liberals. Over a billion dollars delivered and spent on educating our young people.

And all the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has managed to live within its fiscal means, balancing each and every year their budgets, and at the same time paying down debt.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the people of Saskatchewan understand that that's no small feat. That's no small feat because some difficult choices and some very difficult decisions have been made by members on this side of the House. This caucus has put a lot of thought into each and every budget and they poured their hearts into those budgets because they're concerned about the future of their kids and their grandchildren.

And so I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the people in this province have had a very, very close look since 1991 at the operation under this Premier. And they're going to have a chance to pass judgment shortly. Maybe this June or maybe in October, I don't know. Or maybe next June, but for sure within a year they're going to have a chance to pass judgment on this government.

And what are their choices, Mr. Speaker? They've had a look at what we've said we would deliver — a balanced approach to tax reduction and to debt reduction and program enhancement. And I think we can mount a very strong argument that we've been able to deliver on all of those areas.

And I think they're going to have a chance to have a look at what we've done and where we want to lead this province in the future as well. And part of that, Mr. Speaker, will be delivered

by the Minister of Finance when he brings down yet another balanced budget.

We're going to have the opportunity, as a matter of fact the responsibility, to choose between a re-election of this administration, or choosing to replace it with the parties opposite. So what are the choices, Mr. Speaker? I say, one, between a proven track record of integrity and responsibility and good, sound management.

But I think it's fair to say that on the other side it may be a little more abstract when they're going to make their choice. And I want to speak about why I think it's going to be a little more abstract in terms of the choice of this Tory Party that calls themselves the Saskatchewan Party because they can't handle the record of the 1980s when they were Tories. So they're going to have a chance to have a look at them.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the opposition, the Saskatchewan Party. I want to talk about who these Tories are, and why the people of Saskatchewan will have a responsibility to look at the integrity of the people that make up that party. Because I think that's important.

It's one thing to talk about reducing taxes and being able to deliver, and being able to believe that that would actually happen under that kind of an administration. And it's another thing to talk about delivering a better quality of health care at the same time you talk about freezing, for five years, the health care budget. It doesn't add up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I want to tell you why it doesn't add up. Because there isn't an administration in this country that hasn't had trouble struggling with, maintaining, and enhancing health care services at a time when prescription drug costs are going up, new technical instruments are coming on stream that cost many millions of dollars. Where there are demands on salaries and salary levels, it's a very difficult budget to freeze. But this operation says and tells the people of Saskatchewan, we can freeze this budget for five years and still, still deliver the best quality health care system in Canada.

Well, I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I ask the people of Saskatchewan the question, whether this group of Tories — this group who were responsible for the election of the Devine government in 1981 — can in actual fact or would even try to pull that off.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't add up. So you ask yourself in terms of integrity, can you believe what they say with respect to health care? I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that you shouldn't. You should be very wary. Be very wary.

And I want to say as well, that this is the same group of people who are going to freeze the education budget for five years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They're going to freeze the education budget but they're still going to allow for the universities and SIAST and the K to 12 system to be able to buy the materials to educate our kids, to be able to fund the capital projects that are going to be required. But they can freeze the education budget for five years and they can still make it all work.

I say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there isn't one of them over

there. They can't do it individually and they can't do it collectively — it's not possible. And what you need to do, and what the people of Saskatchewan I think would expect from government in this province, is to take a balanced approach. Put their budgets together based on need, based on the ability to put the money to the priority areas the people of Saskatchewan have told us they care about and that's mainly health care and education.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, they're going to promise tax cuts as they did under the Devine administration when he was elected in 1981, but people aren't going to be fooled because you can't square that circle and people know it.

People understand that we're still paying \$2 million a day to service a debt that was built by them and the political party that they represent. Those are the people and that's the legacy, and that's the kind of integrity that people understand, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to talk a little more about integrity and I want to talk about how this particular political party was formed. I want to tell you firstly why it was formed. It was formed because the leader — the member from Kindersley — of the Saskatchewan PC (Progressive Conservative) Party knew they didn't have a hope of ever forming government under the Tory banner. And his colleagues that sat in here as Tories knew that as well. And I want to tell you as the Liberal Party disintegrated, the Liberals who were sitting there, knew that they didn't have a chance. And the people wouldn't trust where they were coming from when they hatchet their party — their own party — internally in the middle of the night.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — So they stole together in the middle of the night, never told their constituents other than they were loyal to their political affiliation and their political persuasions, but all of a sudden the Saskatchewan Party was born.

But I want to say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, born of what? I'll tell you what it was born of. It was born of Progressive Conservatives; Tories who were part and parcel of the political force that elected Grant Devine and built a \$15 billion debt. That's part of where it came from. That's part of where it came from, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and no one should deny that that's the case.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, there's going to be more evidence of this in days to come because you're going to see former Progressive Conservatives who are going to show their head just above the horizon a little bit. Enough to say, well, Saskatchewan Party, maybe they won't recognize me.

And I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're there in the wings and they're waiting and they're going to surface — and we will see them here. And I want to speak about one in particular that I am personally convinced is going to be surfacing as a candidate for this Saskatchewan Party, this, this old Tory Party with a new name.

I want to talk about the member — the former member from Thunder Creek. You mark my words, Mr. Speaker, mark my words, mark my words that this old Tory leader is going to surface as a candidate for this operation.

And I'll give you another one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the president of the Saskatchewan Party in the community of Melville, one Grant Schmidt, former minister of Social Services. I wouldn't ... honest to goodness, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll bet you he'll surface as well. I believe it. Because they want the political power that they had in the 1980s. They want the political power that they had, and they know that they can't have it under the Progressive Conservative banner.

And they know that they can't run in as a Tory, so they got a new name; so they got a new name. But I tell you what they haven't got, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they haven't got credibility. And I want to say that they haven't got the integrity that many members of this House have.

And I just want to talk a little bit about an Act that's before this ... before this House, that speaks about the development and the building of a political party, and when a member of the legislature should find himself at odds with the philosophy or direction of the party that he's sitting with. And it spells what would be I think accepted by the people of Saskatchewan, endorsed in rural and urban Saskatchewan by every Saskatchewan voter, is that you should go back to your riding, resign your seat, and seek re-election, flashing your true colours to the people of Saskatchewan.

And I want to tell you that it's not ... Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're getting a little upset here. But it's not only members of this side of the House who believe that. It's not.

I just mentioned the former member for Thunder Creek, Mr. Swenson, who I think is going to be seeking the nomination under this banner, this new Tory banner, the Saskatchewan Party. And I want to just talk a little bit about where he was, where he was when he still thought there was hope for the Tories in this province when a member crossed over from this side of the House to the other.

And I want to quote and I want to tell the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, exactly where he was. This is in 1993, the Moose Jaw *Herald*, September 18, page 4, and I want to tell you what he said, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm quoting from the paper and it says:

I believe an MLA who chooses to leave the party under whose banner they were elected should step down and seek re-election under their new choice of party banner, or sit as an independent member. Anything less is unfair.

An Hon. Member: — Who said that?

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Who said that? Some of my colleagues are asking who said that. That was the then leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan, Mr. Swenson, and that's what he said.

The headline is, "Turncoat MLA defects with little credibility." And that's what the then leader of the Conservative Party said,

Mr. Speaker. That's what he said. And I see some colleagues of his sitting here. He says they've got no credibility. He says here, in 1993 in the Moose Jaw daily *Herald* that some of his former colleagues have no credibility. That's what he says.

And he says they're being unfair. He says rather than sit as an independent, to resign your seat. Anything else would be unfair.

(1600)

So I say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what credibility, what credibility can these members have when their former leader says they're being unfair, and that they should sit as independents or should resign.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the people have the opportunity to choose between being represented by a member — and my colleague isn't here, I don't see him here — but the member from Cumberland . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order, order. I must remind the member that you cannot make reference to whether the presence or absence of a member in the House. I would remind the member of that.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize. I'm been here long enough to know the rules and I do apologize for mentioning a member's absence. He's missing, as well, a pretty fiery speech I think, but anyway.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go on because I think this is important. We're talking here about credibility and we're talking about integrity and we're talking about a choice for leadership for the future of this province in the upcoming election.

I've talked a little bit about the freezing of health care budget; I've talked a little bit about freezing of the education budget and I think that's important.

But I want to talk about the personal comments that some of the members opposite have made with respect to the changes and crossing the floor and moving from one party, one political affiliation to another. Because I think that too is important. It tells us something about the makeup of this political arm, this old Tory Party with the new name.

And I think the people of Saskatchewan need to be reminded of where these members have been and the kinds of comments that they made with respect to the direction that they would take as MLAs representing people who elected them under a political banner whether it be Liberal or Conservative. But I think that's important because it says something of the nature of the makeup of this political administration, this political party.

Member from Moosomin:

I stood for election as a Progressive Conservative and I'll continue to stand for the same ideals. It wouldn't be fair to the people who . . .

"It wouldn't be fair" — same words, same words as his former leader said.

It wouldn't be fair to the people who elected me for me to suddenly say I now stand for something else.

That's what he said.

That's in November of 1996. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's a short time ago. It's not that long ago. That's not even one full term of government. And I want to quote some more:

I would like to inform the people of Saskatchewan, in particular those in Liberal constituencies, that we are continuing our loyalty and support for the cause of the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan. Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This from the member from Kelvington-Wadena who now sits as a Tory.

And, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I should go on because it's just one after another after another. One member says, I'm a Liberal and I'm proud of it. As a leadership candidate I want to stress very emphatically that I want to bring back that sense of trust in a politician. And that is what I stick with. He knows who he is. I don't need to mention a name, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And this one here who even went halfway:

It's my intent to remain sitting as an independent for the time being. As the election approaches I'll further consider my long-term political career.

Well I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the people from Humboldt will choose the direction of that member's political career in a very short period of time. And it's because of the makeup and the development of this political arm, this arm of Tories who are masquerading under the name Saskatchewan Party, who's only goal is to grab a hold once again the reins of power in this province.

But I think people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have a very, very good memory with that in mind. And I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're going to have ample opportunity in the next weeks and in the next days and in the next months, to make a very reasoned choice based on the past of members on that side of the House and their actions, and based on this government's record.

And I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind, there is no doubt in my mind that the people of Saskatchewan are not going to march to the past and re-elect a group of people who served them so poorly in the 1980s.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, they're looking for the future, they're looking to the future with optimism. And the reason is, is because they've had a government that's been able to work with them in a partnership, to be able to lead that direction. And I want to commend each and every one of my colleagues for the work that they've done in that regard in the last . . . since 1991, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said that I wanted to talk a little bit about the future, and I do. I want to

talk about the future and what it holds for all of us. And I tell you, Mr. Speaker, I'm no crystal ball reader. I can't look into a crystal ball and say with any certainty exactly what this province is going to look like in five or in ten years from now.

But of one thing I'm certain. People are looking for a middle-of-the road, pragmatic approach to governing and I believe they've found it and I believe they see it in this New Democrat government. I don't think they're looking for a right-wing ideology from the member from Kindersley or his group. And I don't think they're looking for a Tory administration that they know and remember so well from the 1980s. I think they understand where that brought us and I think they also understand what the 1990s have done for this province.

And we've made our mistakes as a government. And we will — we'll continue to make mistakes. But I think on balance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we said we wanted to deliver we have. We said we wanted to get a hold of the deficit budgeting . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the member says the worst health care in Canada.

I say to that member, I say to that member we have got the best health care, we've got the best health care in Canada. I want to say to you that this is the only administration that is developing a new health care system that's going to be sustainable and it's going to be affordable.

And I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, we're doing it in spite of the absolutely irresponsible debt load that that member was part of developing in this province — \$2 million dollars a day to service the debt alone, Mr. Speaker, \$2 million a day. Can you imagine what we could do with our health care and our education and our highway system if we had that \$2 million a day?

That member, Mr. Speaker, has little to say, little to say in terms of criticizing any program because of the fact that he's responsible for the \$750 million a year that we spend just servicing his Tory debt of the 1980s. So I say to you, Mr. Speaker, he has little to say.

But I said I wanted to talk about the future. And I do and so I shall. Mr. Speaker, I said at the beginning of my remarks that this administration, recognizing the people of Saskatchewan, recognize the potential of growth of this province. We've got oil, natural gas. We've got uranium. We've got coal, Mr. Speaker. We've got hundreds of years of . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now we have several simultaneous speeches going on here, but there's only one member who has the floor. Order, order. And I refer to hon. members on both sides of the House. And I'll ask for the co-operation of the House to allow the hon. member, the Minister of Energy and Mines, to continue his address response to the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do appreciate your role and the role you're taking in terms of trying to maintain decorum in the House in spite . . .

The Speaker: — Now, now. The minister is a veteran member of the House and is well aware that . . . Order! The minister is well aware that commenting on the conduct of the Chair is out of order, and I'm sure that he'll want to return to his remarks and engage in the response to the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize. I become so enthusiastic when I get back into the legislature — and this is my first speech of the session — I have a very difficult time in sometimes remembering the rules. But I will focus a little more on that and give that much more diligence with respect to that particular issue.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the future of the province. You know, the last few years we've been able to make some very dramatic moves in this province in spite of the fact that agriculture has been depressed and the price of oil has dropped 11, 12, \$13 a barrel. You know what? We're still seeing a growth in this economy. And I think that bodes very, very well for the enthusiasm that the business community and the working men and women in this province have for our economy and developing it, because it says to me we've diversified. It says that there are other elements of our economy that are offsetting the negatives that we experience from depressed gas price or oil prices and . . . So I say, Mr. Speaker, that's one of the reasons that I'm totally and absolutely convinced we've got a very bright future.

You know, the oil and gas sector had a record year in Saskatchewan here in 1997. And part of it is because we, as a government, were able to sit down and work in a partnership arrangement with them to develop a royalty and a taxation structure that would attract investment so that they can invest in drilling oil wells and gas wells here in our province. They done a heck of a job.

And, Mr. Speaker, the partnership that we've been able to build as a government has been able to allow PanCanadian to come to this community and take a depleting oil resource, develop new technology, put new technology to it, inject billions of dollars — a billion-plus dollars — and extend the life of that particular project for 25, 30 years, creating jobs and spinoff benefits for businesses that serve that operation.

And there are exciting things on the horizon coming, Mr. Speaker. Oil and gas companies are talking about developing small battery-located upgraders so that our heavy crude can be moved into the system. And that means dollars and it means jobs.

In the potash industry IMC (International Minerals and Chemical Corporation (Canada) Ltd.), as an example, is committing to \$481 million in investment between three to five years in upgrading their existing mines.

And there's more. And I think that speaks for the confidence for the future of this province, jobs for young men and women in Saskatchewan. There's two new uranium mines coming on stream up North. Millions of dollars being invested in exploration and development. And I think that speaks well for the future of this province.

There's millions of dollars being invested investigating

kimberlite tubes that are normally host to diamonds. And they're excited about the opportunity to perhaps find and locate a diamond mine here in Saskatchewan. And I think that's exciting.

But you want to know, Mr. Speaker, what is more exciting and what is most exciting? I think what is even more exciting, Mr. Speaker, is the enthusiasm I hear from young people about the future of this province in spite of what members of that opposition party will say. And they can preach gloom and doom. And they can do that.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, and I can speak from personal experience because there's a young man and woman who are planning a marriage in Prince Albert in August who plan to spend their lives here in Saskatchewan in business, and I want to say, Mr. Speaker, they're not alone. They're not alone. My son and his fiancée plan on establishing a business in Prince Albert and they're making Prince Albert their home. And I'm proud of them for that.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, they're not alone. And the statistics with respect to Saskatchewan's population and jobs and job opportunities for young people bear out that they're not alone. We've had job growth in this province year over year. We've had retail sales growth year over year in spite of the fact that they can bring out an isolated number once in a while that will show a little dip and a little downturn. It's a natural thing; that's how business works. But what you've got to do is look over the longer haul.

(1615)

And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, people are looking over the long haul. And they know that this is a good place to do business. It's a good place to raise your family. And they've got trust in the government and the businesses that create those kind of opportunities — so unlike the mood that was there in the 1980s under the Devine Tory administration, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of my colleagues suggests that the former premier has decided to run again, and that could be. And if he were, I'd welcome him here, Mr. Speaker. And I think a safe place for him would be in the opposition benches with all his other Tory colleagues.

And I think it'd be a great idea for the former member from Melville, Mr. Schmidt, to join them over there. And the member from Thunder Creek, Mr. Swenson, the former leader, to join them over there. And Grant Devine to join them over there because you know something, Mr. Speaker, they'd be right at home. They'd be right at home, and they should be, because it's the some old Tory.

An old friend of mine said one time you can't change the spots on a leopard, and I think that's the absolute truth, because you can't. And a Tory is a Tory is a Tory.

And they can fiddle with the polls and do selective polling and come up with a number that makes them feel good when they go home. But I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province will not and do not accept them for anything more than what they are and what they were, and that's Tories.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — And I think, Mr. Speaker, I think, Mr. Speaker, a lesson has been learned by all of us and it's not a lesson we were about to repeat. What have we delivered, Mr. Speaker? We've reduced personal income tax. We've been reducing the sales tax. We've selectively reduced the taxes on manufacturing and processing. We've reduced the number of Tories, which is probably the best thing that we've done in the last decade.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, we've got no intentions of turning our direction with respect to tax reduction or Tory reduction because we're bent on moving in that same, same direction.

And I know, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are a little testy today and I can understand that. I'll tell you, if I were an old Tory — if I were an old Tory sitting in the benches here and someone was bringing up my record, I can I tell you, I'd be a little uncomfortable as well.

So I don't blame you. No one can hold you to fault for that, Mr. Speaker. They shouldn't be held at fault for that at all, it should be understood. And even we should be understanding about that.

But I want to say . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . oh, now they are creeping higher in the polls.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when you're down here and you creep up to here, you haven't moved a long way.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, when you've got a legacy, and a record of Mulroney and Devine and governments — Tory governments of the 1980s — you should be excited about a small move from here to here, because you're not likely to see a bigger one.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close my remarks by again saying to the people of Saskatchewan and particularly to the people of Prince Albert Northcote, who I've been fortunate enough to represent since 1986, that I appreciate their confidence in this government. And I want to say that we will continue to work hard in the areas of debt reduction, and tax reduction, and program enhancement, and ensuring that the future of this province will house good opportunities for their children and their grandchildren, because that's why we were elected.

Mr. Speaker, we weren't elected on a platform of unreasonable promises. We were elected on a platform of balanced government, fair government, and reasonable government, and that's what we've continued to strive towards.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, we'll make our mistakes. We'll make plenty of them. There are hundreds of decisions to make every day and we don't all make the right ones. But I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, and the members opposite are very, very concerned about health care and I recognize that. And the comments that we're hearing from them would tell me they're concerned about it. But then what they should do is re-look at their platform. Because I say to members opposite you can't freeze the health care budget for five years and maintain a level

of service. You can't do it.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Now the . . . Order. The hon. minister is a veteran member and he knows that debate in the House is properly directed to the Chair. And I think we're seeing much evidence of what happens here when hon. members direct their remarks directly to other members on the other side of the House. Order. Order. And I'll encourage the hon. minister to continue his debate but to direct his remarks through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, you're right and again I apologize. And I shouldn't make excuses but it's like a magnet, Mr. Speaker. And I think you can understand that, after being a seasoned member of this legislature as well. But I will focus my remarks through the . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Now the hon. minister is well aware as well of course that it's improper to draw the Speaker into debate. And I'm sure that he'll want to avoid doing that as well as he proceeds with his remarks in the debate and response to the Speech from the Throne.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, you are right. You are right. I want to talk about health care, Mr. Speaker, and I want to talk about the former administration and their record — the former Premier Devine.

You know, Mr. Speaker, before I talk about the health care I can recall very vividly a debate that took place between the former premier, Mr. Devine and myself. And we were going on one evening and he was trying to justify the debt based on all the projects that he put together and indicating that that's why we were having some success as a government in the 1990s. And he went on to tell us that the debt was there because he had done the right things and in putting that debt in place he was actually doing well for the young people of this province. Mr. Devine — that was the thesis of his remarks, that's what he was suggesting was what this is all about.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker, they got the message. I didn't because I didn't buy his theory. But they do and what are they out promising? They're out promising tax reduction, tax relief, and you wait. They're not done. They've done a little, they talked a little bit about the PST but you'll hear more. You'll hear lots more, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Saskatchewan are going to hear irresponsible promises like the removal of the fuel tax. And it was good politics. It was great politics but it wasn't long-term economics. And Grant Devine and those Tories were out campaigning in 1982 and again in 1986 and they tried it again in 1991.

But people wouldn't buy it because, Mr. Speaker, people are sophisticated. The electorate are a sophisticated lot and they can use a computer as well as anyone and they know you can't promise tax reduction, enhanced expenditures on highways by the hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, and still balance budgets.

Because people have a very, very strong memory of the former premier, Mr. Devine and Mr. Schmidt, and Mr. Swenson and those that sat with him and those that are likely to come back

with this group. They have a good, good memory of that. And I say, Mr. Speaker, you don't change the spots on a leopard. They can't hide who they are; they shouldn't try . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . One of my colleagues says probably the most appropriate comment would be just to say I'm sorry. And that may in fact be the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close my remarks by again saying that people of Saskatchewan are very enthusiastic about this province.

And what I find encouraging as well is people outside of this province are looking at what we have done in Saskatchewan in amazement. When I have the opportunity to travel in other provinces and other jurisdictions who follow what's been happening, what the Devine legacy left us here and how we've been able to turn that around since 1991, I come home very encouraged. People of this country understand what we've been able to achieve as a people in the province. And the only people, Mr. Speaker, who are somewhat ashamed — I would suggest to you — of who they are and what they are, are the members who will not even run under their true political name and who they are and what they are.

But I'm not going to dwell on that because I think people understand that and I want to say to you that the future of this province is very bright. And members on this side of the House are going to continue to work, as we've never worked before through these difficult times, to ensure that we remain a province with balanced budgets; and that we have the best education system anywhere in Canada; and that we have an infrastructure that can house and be a home to economic development and job creation. And that the great people of this province who know and understand their province so well, we'll continue to work with them to ensure that Saskatchewan does have a great future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by saying that I'm very much looking forward to the next election because I think the people of Saskatchewan are very excited about going to the polls. They're excited about going to the polls because they have a chance to reaffirm and to reconfirm their beliefs, their beliefs in the future of this province, and they're not going to go back to the Devine administration of the '80s and those that worked with them and those that surrounded themselves with that administration. They're not going to go back there.

They're looking for an enhancement to what they already know is a bright, bright future and a bright place in this province of ours. And so I want to say to all of my colleagues that I will be not supporting the amendment to the Throne Speech. I will be endorsing and wholeheartedly supporting the Throne Speech. And I very much look forward to the Finance minister's delivery of what I know is going to be a very well received and a very positive budget for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well it's been a really good time to come into the debate after having had a couple of days of listening to both sides sort of getting at it and discussing the Speech from the Throne.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I'm glad to be back and glad to see you in the chair again and echo all those kinds of remarks that we always can be depending on not being able to give to you for your fine work.

People out in our constituency fortunately, too, have had a couple of more opportunities to watch the Assembly and its delivery through our television system. And I want to thank you for your part in that on their behalf. I'm sure they appreciate what you've done along with the other folks to bring these messages to them. A couple of folks have called in and said that they are enjoying watching each day, especially question period, and those parts of the day.

As I motored in today from the Cypress Hills on No. 1 Highway, I found myself, Mr. Speaker, down to . . . a little under the speed limit because it was very foggy in places. And I found myself having therefore a little more time to concentrate on the important things of daydreaming and thinking about the Speech from the Throne and the things that had gone on in it.

The reality being, of course, that the speech itself could very well have been one that I've heard maybe two or three times before, maybe every time that we've come here. And if you aren't really, if you aren't really, really listening, you would find yourself wondering if there was anything in the speech at all or why we even bothered to come and listen to it, to be quite honest with you. But it does make sense to do these procedural things, and the pomp and ceremony is all part of the system. And for new folks coming in the first time or two I'm sure that it was very enjoyable for them.

But the reality is that from a political point of view and if you're looking for some substance, there wasn't any. There wasn't anything different in this budget than we've heard time and time before. And I'm really hoping that the budget day will come up with some new incentives and new initiatives for our province. But we don't need the same old rhetoric, we don't need the same old complaints, and we don't need the same old suggestions that it's somebody else's fault in the past.

This government's had two terms now, just about finishing that second one. It's time they got on their own back feet and stood up and did something for themselves. Quit whining and complaining about the legacy they have, and get on with the future of your own lives and your own determinations and your own plans, if you have any. And I'm starting to wonder if there are.

But maybe in the budget speech we will see that, and I'm hopeful that that will happen, because it is dearly important to our province and to the constituency of the Cypress Hills.

A couple of people have alluded to the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we haven't talked very much about agriculture, and a lot of folks of course don't have an agricultural background, as I've noted. They've spoken to the speech and they haven't commented on the crisis in agriculture because of course they're not farmers.

But I am and I represent a rural community, and although oil and gas and those industries are important to us, agriculture is very important. And so I want to take a couple of minutes to

talk about the agricultural crisis and how it alludes to the Speech from the Throne and how it of course impacts my constituency in the province.

(1630)

Mr. Speaker, without agriculture this province of Saskatchewan cannot continue. It cannot continue even after the sort of slow, mundane pace that we are rolling along at. It'll simply become a desert wasteland without agriculture because we have to have something as a basis, something that is solid, and that's what this province is all about and has been.

I was very disappointed the other day to read an article that came out of one of our newspapers, I believe it was the "Crossroads" — comes out of that Rosetown country up there in Kindersley . . .

An Hon. Member: — Kindersley *Clarion*.

Mr. Goohsen: — Yes. And there you go. The Kindersley *Clarion*, carrying an article talking about how Mississippi is the poorest state in all of the United States and that there isn't one province in Canada that is as well off as Mississippi. I find that to be very disheartening, to find out that we rank so low on the scale as compared to our neighbours.

And then when you take a look at the Canadian situation, we find ourselves lagging behind eight of the other provinces, and there's some doubt about Newfoundland even being, you know, poorer than we are any more. And there's no need to go into that except to reflect on the reality that if we are looking at those kind of comparisons, we are in serious trouble — serious trouble as a country, serious trouble as a province. Trouble that we don't have to tolerate or put up with because what we have to do is work on our basics and our fundamentals, which is the industries that are the bottom line of our country and our province. In Saskatchewan, that's got to be agriculture. It has to be.

I was really disappointed as well this morning when I received a letter from the Minister of Agriculture federally. And in his letter he explained how our new crisis program is going to unfold. It is an absolute disaster, a total joke. There is no help for most of our farmers. A few pig growers are going to get some money.

I talked to an accountant the other day. He said to me if you took all of the money that has been promised and you put it into a formula and divide that formula out using 25 bushels to the acre wheat in Saskatchewan and you only applied it on the wheat acres that have potential to grow, you'd have a 25 bushel crop; it would come out to 16 cents per bushel is what the entire subsidy would be. And that's nothing for the hog producers or all the other agricultural producers.

And that, Mr. Speaker, is more of an insult than a help, because in reality if you do help a few people — and I'm glad if they get it and I'm glad if they have the help — but it won't put us into a competitive position with the Europeans and the Americans.

And we are into a serious problem with the subsidy war with the Americans and the Europeans continuing to battle for a

marketplace and bigger share when the reality is that, as we go on, there are still lots of hungry people, and we only have to work on the economies of the world in order to find ways to get the poor people to have access to the grains that we can produce.

We cannot overproduce. We cannot overproduce for the amount of people in the world that will gladly eat the food that we can grow. What we have is a problem with the politics of our country and the politics of the world.

So in this aid program, I'm saying to the members of the government, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we've got to rethink this whole approach. We've got to get back down to Ottawa and we've got to start talking about something that makes a real difference. Unless we want to end up like Mississippi or if we want to end up like maybe North Dakota where you have 600,000 people left and farms where you can watch your dog run away for three days and he hasn't even got to the neighbours yet. And that's the sort of thing that we're heading for in Saskatchewan.

We're going to have an absolute devastation of the rural population if it continues to drop. We've got people talking now about whether or not you can maintain a municipality with so few people. What is the magic number? How few people can you have in an area before you cancel the municipality as a result of no population? How few dollars for income from the assessments before you cancel the municipality because there's no longer a tax base there and maybe even no need for the roads that are being built?

When that happens, Mr. Speaker, we are heading for some serious problems.

So in agriculture I think we have to take a look at what SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) has come up with. And I just happened to be reading *The Rural Councillor* the other day and in that *Rural Councillor* they talked about a new approach which would be an old approach in a lot of areas of the world, especially the United States, and that would be to have a set-aside program.

Now as I've said, I don't believe that we have a surplus of food and I don't believe that, in good conscience as Christian people, that we should not produce food for people that are hungry. But if the world is determined to say to us that they don't need the product that we're growing, if they're serious about that, then about a set-aside program as people in SARM have been suggesting.

How about a set-aside program where we pay people \$20 an acre not to plant an acre? Now you're going to have to start at something as substantial and something that's realistic because it is going to cost a farmer so many dollars just to maintain an acre because of the tax structures and the pressures that we have in terms of necessary payments that we incur as producers, agricultural producers, whether we grow a bushel of wheat or not. We all start out the year owing so much per acre for our input costs whether we do anything or not. And that is land taxes and those kind of things that are fixed costs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that it's high time that our Minister

of Agriculture took a hard look at some of these alternatives — alternatives that people in other countries are using — and stop worrying about whether or not it's going to show up as green in some international dispute. Because obviously what the other people are doing is not green, if they want to use those colours as definitions.

They're not treating us fairly. They're not working on a level playing field. And they're not playing fair.

So we have to do what we have to do to survive. And I think we have to look at some of these programs like going to a set-aside program. Or at least we're going to have to put up enough dollars so that in reality people get enough money to be able to survive.

Now the older farmers, Mr. Speaker, again if they've had their bills paid in the 1980s, they're going to have them paid in the 1990s, and they're going to be fine and they'll survive until they retire or die. But the younger farmers are not going to be able to come into this industry and they will not be able to survive.

And any farmer that had debt in the late 1980s has not had enough time in the relatively good years that we've had — the few of them that we have had — to pay off the debts they incurred in the '80s. And that's one of the crunch problems in this whole crises.

Those people that didn't have their land secured are now in a position where they are losing it. We're going to see auction sales again in the southwest, although we don't have that many people left. You kind of wonder how come we can keep on having auction sales with so few farmers, but they still are showing up and they're showing up in bigger numbers again. The most unsuspecting farms are coming up for sale. It's just an absolute shock to find out that people are going out of business and going broke once again. It's into the same old cycle of what goes around comes around.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite want to have somebody talk about agriculture and the problems in agriculture, believe me we can stand here and talk for a few days.

But I want to suggest to the other members that if one of them wants to speak for a few minutes, that I will be talking about a few more points and then they can be ready to get at it and go at it too. Because I think we need to all share our opinions on these issues.

I want to deal a little bit with some of the health problems that have happened especially in southwest. And I want to suggest some alternatives and some ideas perhaps that the government might want to use.

We've had a couple of circumstances in the southwest; one at Frontier where a young man had to go to Medicine Hat for an operation and they couldn't seem to get the air ambulance. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm suggesting to the government members that they have to take a look at redesigning how they run the air ambulance system.

Apparently one man sits in Saskatoon and has the say of whether or not the plane flies or where it goes. That to me has to be corrected. Now I can see somebody making a decision because of weather problems, but to make a decision based on the fact that it's a long ways away is simply not going to wash in this day of age because everything is a long ways away, especially where you'll need an air ambulance.

And we definitely have to take a look at that alternative for people in rural areas. We have to look at getting air ambulance more and more, as we have fewer and fewer hospitals with fewer and fewer of the very necessary services.

Can you imagine being a farmer working in southwest Saskatchewan, a hundred miles from anyplace, and then finding out you can't even get an air ambulance with your leg cut off or some other tragedy occurring. And I know I've talked about these things before but we have to repeat some of this because it's very serious out in rural Saskatchewan and it does need attention.

When you find yourself suggesting to your constituents, as I have done in the past six months, that the best alternative they've got is to find a doctor who's receptive to getting you to Medicine Hat as your alternative to health care, then I say we are in serious trouble. And certainly we are in that serious trouble because that's exactly what is going on.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that in our small towns we oftentimes take life for granted and the goodness of life for granted. And I suppose that there are times in every small town, and maybe it happened all over the province this year, but we've run into times when we lose a lot of our local residents to death. And it happens in our community all too often this last while. And I wanted to just mention this because it has a tendency to drag down a community a bit and it's difficult to sort of get up and get ready for spring.

We had six deaths in our community in recent days, not related whatsoever. In recent weeks, starting off with the former mayor of Gull Lake who was the principal in our school. Just the best fellow you'd ever want to meet. And he passed away suddenly and we were all just shook right up. He was instrumental — Gerry Elmslie was the gentleman I'm talking about — instrumental in getting the football program going in Gull Lake that has resulted, of course, in the fact that the Gull Lake Lions are known all over the province as the football town.

Yes, and then Redvers took a dumping from Gull Lake Greyhounds the other day too, in hockey. So we managed to show them both in hockey and in football.

I wanted to though, Mr. Speaker, to seriously talk about the losses. And of course Mae McLavish passed away in our town a couple of weeks back, and she of course was my landlady when I went to school, was my surrogate mother, and I dearly loved her and will miss her.

And of course my Aunt Marie, she passed away, a family-oriented person, and we were so glad to have her as an example in our community of a woman who was a Christian-based person that dedicated her life to her children and to her Christian beliefs.

And then we had of course Bud Mortensen, a local fellow that was a farmer and worked in the oil patch who helped me so much to understand the need in past years for farmers and the oil industry to be able to work together and to share the land and to share the two resources and the benefits that would come to our community. And so I will always remember him and always be saddened by the fact that he left us so quickly.

And then of course we had Al Nyen, our John Deere dealer, who worked for years in our community and who always had a smile on his face, no matter how bad things were at home. He was always there to help the community and he was always there with a good idea, always there willing to do and help and serve others. And his untimely death, even though he was older, was a great shock as well to our community.

And just last week, of course, Ken Logan passed away, a younger man, younger than myself, died of cancer, and fought valiantly but was respected by all of the people in our community. And I've often said that Ken was probably a little bit further to the right than Mark Clary, the mayor from Leader, and I called Ken often as a mentor to get his advice and his input into how I should conduct myself here in this Assembly. And I will truly miss him as well.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I know that we don't always take a lot of time on individuals in our Assembly, but there's a collective thought here, a collective thought of how we've lost so many good people in our community in such a short time, and that thought of course being that it's a terrible shock to us all. But I also want to take this opportunity to recognize that it probably happens to other communities, and I'd like to offer my condolences to the families of all of the people who have lost loved ones and friends over this past winter. I'm hoping that the spring suns will bring this to an end and that spring will finally be here and that we can watch the crocuses grow and enjoy going out to watch the gophers and the geese before long and not have to dwell on our losses.

Mr. Speaker, we have a situation in Saskatchewan where we are looking at going into spring work with an awful lot of farmers wondering, what should we plant? Should we plant anything? It is really devastating to have to listen day after day on the telephone to people asking, how is this aid program going to work and what should I seed? And I haven't really got any advice for them. I just absolutely don't know because I haven't got a clue what to seed on my own farm.

But I do know one thing: that if the input costs weren't so high in this province, then it would be easier to take less for the products we sell. And one of the areas that came to my attention here this other . . . the last couple of days is fertilizer prices. Fertilizer prices, I was told at a Pool meeting, have gone down just a little bit from last year but basically they're going to be about the same, I was told, and they're going to stay there.

Well I hope that's wrong. Because realistically if farmers have to continue to pay the escalated costs of inputs along with trying to balance everything else at a time when their sales are low and not only low because of the strikes — the west coast and that's a whole other subject and we could get into that for a long time — but the reality is that farmers definitely need to have some lowering of input costs and the way that this government can

help is so significant.

They don't realize it but there are a lot of good areas that they could work on. They can work on education land on property. For example, now if a bigger percentage of the education were paid for through other vehicles instead of on property tax, that would lower the input costs for farmers. It may not be the best way in the world to do it but it's available to this government, and it's available now, and they could do it now and they could do it effectively to put some dollars into the hands of farmers.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that this government understand that reducing taxes is not such a bad thing. It's a leap of faith I know, and it's always hard to have that when things seem to be going against you. But you've got to sometimes take a leap of faith and do these things to reduce taxes to stimulate economies.

While reducing costs for farmers may take some dollars out of the government's pockets immediately, but in the long run it will pay off because we'll still have those people here to buy in our retail markets and just to be a part of our social structure using the health care, the education, and all the rest.

If all of the farmers are gone, what are those schools going to do? They have to do only one thing — close. The same with our hospitals. If we lose the population we have to have the base, and lowering these prices and these costs are things that can be done by this government. And they can do it now, and they could do it with balance and with some degree of integrity.

(1645)

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I was disappointed in something that seems very small, I suppose, to a lot of people, which is one of the Bills that we received today, an Act respecting the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute and the changes that are going to be there.

I had hoped, Mr. Speaker, that the government and the Department of Agriculture would be looking at some of the things that our neighbours are doing in these areas, the things that are happening in Manitoba for example, and Alberta, with regards to lowering or rather increasing the warranties on machinery.

A simple thing like that and this government misses it. It's like it just hit them right on the head and bounced right off. And I've written them letters and people have talked to them.

In Manitoba they have passed laws that extend warranties on farm machinery, and people that sell self-propelled equipment have to extend warranties on \$250,000 combines for two years instead of one.

It's almost amazing. Some people just blink and shake their heads. And they say you pay \$250,000 for a combine and you get one-year warranty; \$200 in fuel; back in the shed. And it's not guaranteed next year when you pull out in the field.

Well that's the way it is. If the motor falls out of it, you're the farmer. You pay 20 or \$30,000 for a new motor on a machine that's hardly worked at all. And you hold the bag all by yourself as a farmer.

In Alberta and Manitoba they're addressing those kind of questions. In Saskatchewan all we worried about is how we can dupe enough people into voting for us the next election. And that is why we are getting behind in this province. It doesn't matter how long we exist. We will always have a government, and it will always be electing somebody.

The reality is though that the province continues to shrink and to get smaller and to get poorer. And we become even worse off than we are — worse off than Mississippi, the poorest of the poorest. The poorest state in the whole union of the United States of America. And we're poorer than they are, and even poorer than the other provinces.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture has got his work cut out for him. And in the days to come I hope that through the budget debate and all the rest of the estimates that we will take enough time to talk about all the agricultural problems.

There are many that I haven't touched on. There's lots of things in the oil and gas industry that I haven't touched on today that need to be talked about, especially in terms of how they affect my constituency and the people that live there. And the ones that are left are truly the best. And the ones that have moved away — thank goodness they come back and visit once in a while or we'd really be getting lonely.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll conclude my remarks for today.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to reply to the Throne Speech. Although being my short tenure in here about three, three and a half years, it has to be without a doubt the flattest Throne Speech that I have ever heard.

And I'd like to talk on each specific area, Mr. Speaker, that the Throne Speech touched on. And the first one I'd like to talk about is agriculture. I think if I remember right, in the Throne Speech there had to be at least one whole line about agriculture in the Throne Speech.

Farm aid, Mr. Speaker, I think was lacking. The comment about lacking in the Throne Speech, about what is needed in agriculture, what farm aid we need out there.

And I'd like to go through some of the reasons I feel we're in a position we're in. A lot to do with what the provincial government has done, or not done. And a lot to do with what the federal government has done and not done.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go back to when we went down East last fall as an all-party committee, the Minister of Agriculture, myself, and I believe it was the member for Thunder Creek. After we lobbied the minister to put an all-party committee together he finally agreed, and down we went.

What happened down there, Mr. Speaker . . . and I found this interesting because I'm a farmer from Saskatchewan. Never been to Parliament Hill and especially had never met with the Standing Committee on Agriculture. What it was really, was about 12 MPs (Member of Parliament) of all parties gathered there, and we made a presentation. And by we, I mean the Ag

minister gave a presentation on behalf of Saskatchewan, the only presentation that was allowed.

There was a gentleman from Quebec gave a presentation on behalf of the Quebec farmers. I believe he was the union leader of the farmers' union in Quebec — a very interesting little gentleman, Mr. Speaker. He looked to me to be about 4 foot 5 and yet after he spoke he looked like he was about 6 foot 9. They listened to every word that man said; it was just the way he put it across.

And once again, I think it's the way they listen to people in Quebec over us. And I think we all have a problem with that, but that's the way the system seems to work.

The Agriculture minister gave our presentation. I actually believe, Mr. Speaker, he gave a very good presentation on behalf of Saskatchewan and farmers. But after giving him that compliment I have to stop there, Mr. Speaker, because what happens is after you give your presentation the MPs have the chance to question the members giving statements.

So it went around. Each MP had their questions and finally it came to one of, I believe it was one of the Liberal government side MPs, and his comment was and I quote, "Mr. Agriculture Minister from Saskatchewan, have you balanced your books in Saskatchewan?" And our ag minister said, oh yes we have, and his buttons bounced right out and his shirt tightened right up and said, you bet. In fact, he said, we've even got a surplus here in Saskatchewan.

Or the guys . . . the MP from down there, Mr. Speaker, said, well, and I understand you right you're down here asking for farm aid for your farmers. And our ag minister said, yes we are.

Well the MP said, you know we balanced our books and we have a surplus. Are you willing to put some of your surplus in for farm aid for your farmers? And our Agriculture minister right away said, no we're going to be stubborn in Saskatchewan. We're going to lobby hard. It's your problem, we're not going to put any money in; it's totally a federal responsibility.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I noticed — and I believe the member for Thunder Creek will agree with this — that at that point I believe we lost their interest. They weren't all that sure they wanted to help us because they weren't all that sure we wanted to help ourselves. And they weren't all that sure there was actually a crisis in Saskatchewan because we weren't willing to help ourselves.

And what do we see at this point with a farm aid plan that's been made up by bureaucrats in the federal Department of Agriculture with no input from Saskatchewan because we weren't at the table with any funding for our farmers.

Why would they listen to us, Mr. Speaker, when we weren't willing to do anything for our farmers. They were not willing to let us get to the table, have input into a plan that had some meaning such as a seeded acreage payment.

And what do we have? We've come up now for farmers in Saskatchewan with a 70 per cent income-based program that I

honestly believe will help hardly any farmers, least of all the ones in the most need.

And, Mr. Speaker, let's for an example use the farmers in the North Battleford . . . northwest corner. These farmers have had four or five very dry years. Their income has been very low for those four or five years. And now what we see and to qualify for aid you have to take a three-year average and be 70 per cent of that before you qualify. The people probably the worst in the province are not going to qualify for 1 cent of aid. So what good is a program like that?

Once again I say if we'd have paid an acreage payment, yes, we may have touched on farmers that didn't need it as bad as others. No. 1, the money would be out there, Mr. Speaker, and no. 2, everyone would receive help in this province that needed help.

Accountants, Mr. Speaker, I believe are the main ones going to benefit from this program. Because what I hear today is that a number of accountants are charging anywheres upwards of 800 to a thousand dollars to put through this Mickey Mouse program that we've come out with. But it's very complicated. It takes a long time to put all the numbers together to see whether you qualify. And you can't do it on your own; it's pretty well impossible. I believe the accountants in this province are the only ones that are actually going to benefit the most from this program.

And don't get me wrong. I have nothing against accountants. I have a very good friend that's my accountant. But I believe he's one of the people that are going to come out with at least a dollar out of this program. I know farmers in my area in the Yorkton and Saltcoats area, are not looking forward to what this program is going to get for them. I believe they have actually gave up on it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I feel that as a provincial government, we've missed the boat here because what we've come up with . . . because we didn't have input into it, is somewhat of a bureaucratic nightmare. Now I know, Mr. Speaker, that the provincial government, the Agriculture minister, the Premier, I've heard them go around the province and say, well we can't afford it. Well I believe we cannot afford not to be part of that program, Mr. Speaker.

I go back to 1992, and this government's record on agriculture has been very dismal, to give them the most credit I possible can. But let's touch once again on the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program, and let's look at the numbers that the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker, came out with, the finalized numbers on GRIP. The Provincial Auditor's numbers, I believe: the province put back into general revenue \$193 million out of the pockets of our Saskatchewan farmers.

That's not the worst part, Mr. Speaker. In doing that they allowed the federal government to take back \$324 million of federal money they had already budgeted for agriculture and put back into their general revenue. So it cost the farmers of Saskatchewan, cancelling GRIP, \$517 million. That's more than we're putting into the two years total farm disaster package between the federal and provincial governments, Mr. Speaker.

I might go on, Mr. Speaker, that I was very disappointed in our Premier through this whole process. He seemed to me to be completely absent for many of the discussions and negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to quote for you, and it's a column by Mark Wyatt of the *Leader-Post*. I believe it's November 6 of '98. But it goes back speaking about what the Premier, some of the comments he had made when he was in opposition in the '80s. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

According to Roy Romanow, an important yardstick by which the Saskatchewan premiers should be measured is how much farm relief they can pry out of Ottawa.

It was a standard Romanow developed during the early 1990s while serving in opposition to former Conservative premier Grant Devine.

According . . .

And again, I quote, Mr. Speaker:

According to the Romanow ruler, a Saskatchewan premier must obtain the full amount of assistance demanded by the producers (or, in reality, the president of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool).

One hundred per cent is the only passing grade and there's no acceptable excuse for coming up short.

"I did my best" doesn't cut it. Budgetary constraints are irrelevant. Long-term solutions don't address today's problems. You either bring home the entire lump, or you're a chump.

And I quote. I quote, Mr. Speaker:

By Romanow standards, Devine was a chump.

Sure, farmers got a \$1-billion dollar federal bailout in 1987, following that infamous midnight phone call between Devine and former premier Brian Mulroney in the midst of the 1986 provincial campaign.

Sure, the feds coughed up another \$850 million in drought relief in 1989.

OK, there was also \$800 million in emergency aid during the 1991 fall campaign.

But in Romanow's humble opinion, it was too little, too late.

And I go on to quote further down in the column, Mr. Speaker:

During the 1991 campaign, Romanow predicted by taking a more adversarial approach, he could lever more money out of Ottawa than Devine could through his buddy-buddy relationship with Mulroney.

Since then we've had numerous opportunities to compare Romanow against his own criteria.

Soon after taking office, Romanow led 150 farmers on a trek to Ottawa in order to squeeze an additional \$700 million out of the Mulroney government.

Other than convincing Mulroney to rearrange his schedule in order to see him, Romanow accomplished nothing. He went there to twist arms and came home with his tail between his legs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they touch on . . . Mark Wyatt touches on the buddy system and I believe there's also a buddy system in place now. But this buddy system is our Premier, and it's also the Prime Minister, Mr. Chrétien. And I had wished and had asked for a number of times but we never receive, our Premier to use that friendship to lobby for aid for Saskatchewan farmers. And where was our Premier? In his bubble as usual when it comes to farmers in this province and fighting for agriculture in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we have had . . . I believe the provincial agriculture minister made the comment at one time that the crisis was over because wheat went up 40 cents a bushel. And I knew at that point we were in big trouble because even the Agriculture minister didn't understand how bad the problem was. Mr. Speaker, the problem is so bad in rural Saskatchewan that farmers even have to have their own tomcats because farms are getting so far apart.

Mr. Speaker, there's many areas in agriculture that are hurting right now. But I was very disappointed to see our Finance minister, when talking about the 1999 budget, took the entire farm aid money that he needed from the budget for '99 and 2000. Instead of taking it from the '99 and 2000-2001 budget, took it all out of the '98 budget, which I believe what he was doing was covering up for the deficit that this government has ran. To break their own rules about deficit financing, and then turned around and blamed the farmers of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, because they couldn't balance the books. Broke their own balanced budget legislation.

And how, Mr. Speaker? How did they . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, order. Order! Order! It now being 5 o'clock, pursuant to rule 3 this House stands recessed until this evening at 7 o'clock.

The Assembly recessed until 7 p.m.

