

EVENING SITTING

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. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we left off before supper we were talking about the farm aid package, and the shortfalls from the provincial government and the federal government to what we received in farm aid. And the one disappointment, I guess . . . And I'll go through it. I started into it before we recessed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it was the, I guess, the deficit budget that this government actually ran but then covered it up with upgrader money and then turned around and blamed it on the farmers of Saskatchewan because they pulled the whole farm aid dollars out of the '98 budget instead of taking out of the '99-2000, 2000-2001 budget. They took it all out of '98 and I believe the only reason that was is to add dollars for the election campaign and the goodies that they're going to hand out to every little group in this province and waste tax dollars that we've had a hard time paying for the last eight years. We're going to hand it away in one bang when the election comes.

The worst part of this, I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we've blamed this on the backs of farmers out there and trying to tell the urban taxpayers in Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, P.A. (Prince Albert), the bigger cities, that we shouldn't be spending their tax dollars on the farmers of this province. The Premier has said that it's our fault there's an urban-rural split. Well I suggest, Mr. Deputy Premier, that it's things like this that cause the urban-rural split, when we're trying to explain away why farmers shouldn't get money and yet on the other hand we're trying to explain why they need it so badly and how bad the crisis is in rural Saskatchewan.

I think why this won't sell, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because people in urban Saskatchewan are starting to understand just how bad the effect is going to be on all of Saskatchewan — not just rural, not just urban. It's affecting everywhere, such as Flexi-Coil in Saskatoon who are laid off a number of workers, I believe it's in excess of 400 at the present time; Morris Rod Weeder in Yorkton who has completely shut down. It affects the member for Yorkton's constituency. So I think it's really a lame excuse when we try to cover up a deficit budget shortfall on the government's behalf . . . mismanagement of provincial funds, and blame it on the backs of farmers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to also touch on another area that has come up just lately, it's an antiquated law, and I think it's time that we had changes made to this. And the Minister of Justice, for an example, feels the law is just fine, doesn't have to be changed. It's a Farm Land Security Board, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The situation that arose in my constituency and I believe is

going to come up in many other constituencies out there because we have so many farmers that are ready to retire but can't sell their land, can't sell it for a fair price, and certainly can't sell it to the highest bidder because of laws that we have in Saskatchewan. Laws I might add that don't exist in Alberta; laws that don't exist in Manitoba — they only exist in Saskatchewan where we've built walls around this province.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we wonder why our population is stuck at one million or under. Alberta has grown to three million when years and years ago they were exactly where we are. And it's these same walls that I believe that have held us at a million people. Why the city of Calgary in the year 2001 will be as big as Saskatchewan is because we are scared of two things: we're scared of change, and we're scared of the word "profit" — that's a dirty word in this province. And as long as we have walls around this province, our population can't build.

The problem we had, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you may be aware of this, is that a farmer in my area found a buyer in Russell, Manitoba. The buyer in Russell, Manitoba offered him a very fair price for his land, had a very similar operation in Russell. And just for information, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Russell is a stone's throw over the border into Manitoba. The deal was made, the down payment was put forth, and the Farm Land Security Board said, no, this deal can't go through because this person is from out of Saskatchewan.

The part, I think, that really disappointed me the most in this decision was the Farm Land Security Board has made exemptions in the past far farther than Russell, Manitoba, but for some strange reason in this case wouldn't go along with it.

Now what they have cost this family out there in my constituency is: number one, a very, fair price for their land, a price they may not have even received from their neighbours; the other thing is they were hired for six years to keep working on this farm so they had the best of both worlds. Number one, they had a very good price for their farm; number two, they could stay and farm that land until they were ready for retirement, retirement age. It was a win-win.

The farmer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, told me that the night they had concluded the sale with the farmer they were ecstatic. It's the best feeling they had for years. They paid all their debts off, had a fair amount of money left over, had a job. It was just a great deal. The next day they went before the Farm Land Security Board and were told this will not happen. And I guess what I'm saying and what that farmer is saying, and I believe many, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many farmers in Saskatchewan that are at that point are saying, we have to change these antiquated laws that are trying to protect Saskatchewan but I think at the same time are hurting us far more than they are helping us.

I think it's time we took a look at things like this, opened our borders up at least to Canadians, Mr. Speaker, to stop this kind of restrictive laws. They're hurting everyone out there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe you know every bit as well as I do — you're from a rural community, rural constituency — many of our farmers are white hair, are ready for retirement but

for one reason or another — whether there isn't a market for their land, whether they can't get a fair price for it, or really, when it comes down to it, nobody really wants to buy it now — can't retire. And I think that's a sad state of affairs in the province of Saskatchewan. We could help that by changing this antiquated law that's been there far too long, opened our borders up.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we could do is bring fresh money into Saskatchewan, bring fresh people into Saskatchewan; maybe our population would grow and maybe we would grow at the same time.

I'd like to touch on taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because a couple of the members across, when they were speaking this afternoon, were so proud of their tax record in Saskatchewan. In fact, I believe one of the members over there said today that the only people in Saskatchewan that say taxes are a dirty word, are the Saskatchewan Party and the taxpayers of Saskatchewan.

Well I have never seen anyone in Saskatchewan, when your government has raised taxes, the members opposite have raised taxes, that anybody has jumped for joy and said, oh great, the NDP (New Democratic Party) has raised taxes; am I happy. So I think it's a dirty word. High taxes, second highest in the country, is a dirty word for everybody except 42 members opposite.

I was really interested, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the member for Saskatoon Southeast. The member for Saskatoon Southeast, Mr. Deputy Speaker, did an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) report here in the summer. And her MLA report made the comment that farmers don't pay taxes. That was right in her MLA report. The member for Saskatoon Southeast doesn't have a clue what she's talking about, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I'd like to just go through a few of the taxes. Taxes on fuel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's talk about diesel to start with. There's a 4-cent-per-litre federal excise tax plus GST (goods and services tax). That's on diesel alone for farm fuel. For farm gas, we pay a 10-cent federal tax. Also on gas we pay a 15-cent-a-litre provincial — and I reiterate provincial — road tax. The member from Saskatoon Southeast just neglected to mention that one. Plus, on top of that, we pay the GST.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know the volume of fuel and gas that farmers use. So on fuel and gas alone, we pay an extremely high amount of tax. We pay the same taxes everybody else does on things we purchase, as urban people do, exactly the same tax.

But another area that farmers are hit — and I believe very hard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you also know this — is education tax on farmland.

Now you can get the average quarter out there, and I don't know what the average would be, but I would guess 5, \$600 an acre, \$400 at least on many quarters, in education tax alone. Now if you get a farmer that owns 15 or 20 quarters of land, that farmer is probably paying 8 to 10,000, \$12,000 in education tax alone.

Where this is a bigger problem is that we have less kids in rural Saskatchewan than we've had for years. Our population's dropping. We have less farmers, so their tax is higher. We have less schools. We have school closures in rural Saskatchewan. And yet at the same time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're being asked to pick up a bigger share of the education tax.

Reassessment . . . reassessment, when it was done a couple of years ago — and the Minister of Municipal Government I'm sure will back me up on this — reassessment shifted the load, not much of it from small-town Saskatchewan to our farmland, and once again it went up. So the member for Saskatoon Southeast better do a little more research before she starts saying farmers don't pay tax.

Some more taxes that we pay, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . and this comes from the Canadian Fertilizer Institute . . . estimates that farmers pay \$300 million in taxes, collected by the federal government on fertilizer each year, \$300 million from fertilizer tax. The member for Southeast, in Saskatoon, should do her homework.

Saskatchewan has the highest fuel tax paid by railway companies in the country. Once again, the members opposite say that we're not the highest. Well, here we are. It says Saskatchewan has the highest fuel tax paid by railway companies in this . . . by provinces in this country. That tax is built into the freight rate charged to farmers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So when we see the deductions on our grain cheque for freight rates, guess what? Part of that is going back to the provincial government. The federal government also collects \$138 million per year from farmers in user fees, and user fees are nothing more than another tax.

We also have provincially a number of environmental taxes, licensing, user fees, stuff like that on tires as an example, oil or filters — all those things return money into general revenue for the government of Saskatchewan. The member for Saskatoon Southeast should wake up, do her homework before she opens her mouth and makes a comment like she did.

We should also mention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that provincial and federal agriculture spending has been cut by 60 per cent over the last five years. So we've done our share to balance your budgets and none of that is being returned to the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've just got an example here I think is interesting. It took 26 bushels of wheat to clothe the farmer in the '30s. In 1998 it took 206 bushels of wheat to clothe that same farmer. In 1938 it took one hundred and twelve and a half bushels of wheat to fill a 500-gallon tank of fuel. In 1998 it takes 401 bushels of wheat to fill that same tank.

In 1938 the property tax on a section of land was \$218.44 and it took 273 bushels of wheat to pay for that tax. In 1998 the property tax on that same section of land are \$3,038.44. That took 1,433 bushels of wheat. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the comparison is 273 bushels of wheat at that time, 1,433 now. So you can see how our costs are rising.

European farm subsidies average \$175 an acre without including the export subsidies for wheat which is \$38 a tonne

on top of that. For barley it's \$74 a tonne. European farm subsidies average 175 bucks an acre, Mr. Deputy Speaker, more than we get for most tonnes of our grain.

Gross operating expenses for Saskatchewan farmers rose from 3.9 billion in '95 to 4.36 billion in '97. So once again you can see how our costs have rose. Gross program spending by the federal government on agriculture for '97-98 was 817 million. A comparison, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) received a \$1.1 billion subsidy in the same year. The federal government spent more on the CBC than it did on agriculture in this country. It makes you wonder where their priorities are, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to also talk about, for just a second, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is municipal government. I believe municipal government, and you know that the Minister of Municipal Government might be able to enlighten us, but I wonder what's going to happen to municipal government this year. For the first seven years that this government has been in power, municipal governments have been cut across this province till last year when they actually pretty well broke even.

(1915)

Well we're being told that we've turned the corner; this government's got things together. Maybe it's time we returned some of the windfall that the municipal governments out there have paid the price for. What better time to put more money into our roads than right now when farmers are hurting so badly. Maybe municipalities could lower the municipal tax if the government would return some of the money that they downloaded on and cost farmers over the last seven years. And once again the municipalities would be very interested to know about the education tax on farm land.

One thing also I'd like to talk about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we hear it across the floor every day in every speech, about the big debt that was left them. Well I'd like to talk about that debt for a minute, and this comes from a Provincial Auditor's report. If you listen to the government members opposite you'll hear them say, we inherited this big debt, which they did inherit a debt, part of which was there when they came into . . . Mr. Devine came to power.

But let's look at the numbers now. In 1991 the overall debt — and I'm just not talking the fixed debt or the fabricated debt that the government talks about, and those numbers quite often are hard to understand what they're saying — but the total debt. And we're talking unfunded pensions, the Crowns, the whole spectrum of debt in 1991 was 17 and a half billion dollars; 1992 that jumped, \$19 billion; 1993, \$19.8 billion. What's happening to that debt? The NDP government's in power and it's still climbing — 1994, the provincial debt total, everything included, was \$20.7 billion.

Now for the first three or four years you people were in power the debt jumped. Now you started it on the trend downwards and you've gone down. In 1991, remember the total debt was \$17.5 billion; 1998, the total debt is 18.9, yet we're told that they're addressing the debt, they're paying the debt down. What they're doing is trying to recover from the debt they increased. They haven't even got it back to where they started from. So

they haven't paid a nickel below what the debt was when they came to power.

So I think it's a deception, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the people opposite to say, we're addressing the debt. They haven't even addressed the debt that they've accumulated since they came to power in 1991.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also . . . I would be remiss if I didn't talk about health care because it's a very important issue in my constituency as well as every other area in this province. And I found it amusing in some of the speeches today — I believe it was the member for Swift Current who should know better; I believe had a care home closed in his constituency — said health care is in great shape, we're wonderful out there.

I think he . . . I might have misunderstood him but I think he said he's going to be re-elected with bells on because health care is in such a wonderful state.

Well I'd just like to quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from a speech that Shirley Douglas gave, Tommy Douglas's daughter, in Swift Current, in your backyard. And I'd like to quote some of the things she said here. And she's going on to say that the state of health care in Canada . . . And I'm sure the members opposite at that stage, part of the speech, thought, this is wonderful — in Saskatchewan we're doing great; the rest of Canada is horrible.

Part of her speech said, and I'll just read parts of it, and I quote:

The daughter of former Saskatchewan premier, Tommy Douglas — the "father of medicare," made an impassioned plea to Canadians to fight to preserve her father's dream of a universal, publicly funded national health-care system.

Then she went on to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I quote:

While Saskatchewan may be the birthplace of medicare, it is not immune to these trends.

Interesting, isn't it?

For example, an American company has been hired to provide laundry services in health-care facilities in Swift Current, she said.

"Aren't we capable of doing our own laundry?" she (said), telling reporters when she heard the news it was like being "stabbed in the heart."

"We're talking about Swift Current, the No. 1 hospital district (she said.) This is the town and the place where the . . . system started," . . .

"When my father used to talk about the slow strangulation of the health-care system this is what he was talking about . . ."

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she's not talking about Ontario. She's not talking about Alberta. She's talking about our Premier, your government, health care in Saskatchewan.

She said:

"You just let them in to wash the sheets, you just (let them in for) lab work, and before you know it you have given the shop away," . . .

Now that's funny because that's coming from one of your own. Tommy Douglas's daughter is running down Saskatchewan's provincial health care. She goes on to say, and I quote:

The privatization of health care is slow, it is incremental and it is massive, she said, noting the dismantling of the national health-care system is by design, not by accident.

So I guess what she's saying it's not by accident you people are doing what you're doing; it's by design. You close 52 hospitals — actually I'm wrong, it wasn't 52 — 53, the Plains was 54. Now I believe the associate minister, did she say 36 more hospitals. No, she said that's not right. That was the Saskatchewan Party saying 36. She said it's somewhere between 13 and 15; I think it's 14 we're going to close. Now she's retracted those comments. Now the Premier says we're not closing another hospital. But don't forget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's the same Premier that stated last spring there will not be one bed lost when the Plains close. And what have we lost? Sixty-four in Regina alone. So who can you trust if you can't trust the Premier? I'm really disappointed.

The Premier also said a number of times, zap. And I would say if you people are elected after the next election it will be zap to 36 hospitals — not 14, not 13, not 15. That rumour I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that rumour wasn't supposed to get out until the members opposite thought they'd be government again.

You know, we have an idea, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Maybe it's time when the federal government throws new money into health care, maybe it's time for an audit for money. Let's check, see where the money's going. These members opposite keep saying, oh we're putting more money in than we've ever put before. And I find it amazing, totally amazing, that we're putting more money into health care than ever before and we're probably lucky if we've got half the health care we had when you people came to government. Waiting lists are longer than they've ever been before. Every day we see people in the gallery that have health care problems that this government isn't addressing. It's amazing when we put more money — it would be like our farms. If we just kept . . . sold a section of land every year or a quarter of land, dump more money in, and close their eyes and neglected to look at the problem, well we'd go broke.

What do we do in Saskatchewan? We raise taxes. Every time we're short of money, oh raise taxes. As the member said, it's only a dirty word, except to the NDP.

Another thing I'd like to talk about and what I think one of the members mentioned this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thought it was quite interesting. He touched the issue of polls and polling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He neglected to say though that the Saskatchewan Party is, I think, 51 per cent and climbing, I think the last I heard. That was two weeks ago.

I think after the Throne Speech, we're probably 52, 53. After some of those speeches this afternoon, probably 54, 55. I believe after the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could top the 60 mark on average which means of course we're probably 90, 95 in some areas of the province.

That doesn't leave much room for the member from Swift Current, the member from Lloydminster. Actually when you think about it, what about the member for Yorkton? Sitting in a hotbed, surrounded by opposition members, I think there's a member in trouble. I honestly do.

Let's talk about his record for a minute, the member from Yorkton, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What was he? Let's go back to his record. I believe . . . was he not Minister of Highways for a while? And the heat got on. Was he Minister of Highways when that piece of pavement come through that lady's windshield? That was in the member for Estevan's constituency where the lady pretty near got killed by the piece of pavement off our great highway system we have here. I believe the member for Yorkton was Highways minister.

Then we moved him out of there and we gave him Health. No, we didn't; you did because we wouldn't have give that to him; we'd have give it to somebody responsible. He had health care . . .

And I'll give you an example of how well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the member for Yorkton did with health care. East Central Health District is the member for Yorkton's home area. Do you know we ended up with East Central Health District when that member finished as Health minister? We have a \$13 million debt in the East Central Health District, his home area. Don't forget that. That's where he lives. That's where he goes for his health care, although he is the same member that goes on three waiting lists at one time.

Then what do we do? We let him out of there, never forgetting that the East Central Health District had a \$3 million deficit this year. Now, just imagine, we give him education. Before he got there I was losing schools. I lost MacNutt School. Now he's Minister of Education, he's got one in his own area that's fighting for survival: Ebenezer. They're begging not to close their school. This man has got a really bad record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for bad things to happen when he's the minister. Don't give him agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, please don't give him agriculture. We're in bad enough shape now.

I'd like to talk for a minute, and we just talked a bit on it, but . . . highways in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This government two years ago, and I believe it was the member for Carrot River when he was minister of Highways said, we're going to put \$250 million into highways, two and a half billion over the next 10 years. The problem being, that government hasn't come close to honouring that commitment in the first two years. Not close, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe 208 million one year, 218 million another year. And we must remember that a lot of that money never reaches our highways. It's ate up in administration that this government's so famous for. The actual dollars that probably get out there to build new highways, after we repair the ones that are broken down, is probably 60 or 70 million a year. It's a pittance.

And I'd be remiss if I let the federal government off, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not totally the provincial government's fault. This federal government we have today, if you look at the numbers, in eastern Canada . . . let's take an example: Newfoundland. I believe it was 400-and-some million dollars over a seven-year period Newfoundland got out of the federal government. PEI (Prince Edward Island): 400-and-some million dollars. I've got as many highways in my constituency as Prince Edward Island. On top of that, they build them a bridge, cost millions upon millions of dollars. What does the federal government put into Saskatchewan for highways in that same period? I believe it was \$35 million over that seven-year period. We want to twin — you want to twin — No. 1 Highway and they don't commit to nothing for twinning of No. 1 Highway.

Where's Mr. Goodale, our beloved, one, lonely, single, little, old MP (Member of Parliament) from Regina here? A little bit of rural riding he's got — I would say that would be enough to knock him off next time. Where is he when we need help? Where was Mr. Goodale when the ag crisis was on? I'm not sure he wasn't in the bubble with the Premier here. They both seemed to disappear about the same time. Neither one has seemed to come out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, highways all over this province are in terrible shape. I'd just like to read off a few just in my constituency alone. There's No. 8 Highway, No. 80 Highway; 15 Highway — I believe was built by one of the past Agriculture ministers in this province, Mr. Edgar Kaeding. It was a bit shorter way to get to Regina — we built a highway. But guess what? Mr. Kaeding's not in government any more. I am. We let the highway crumble. I think it's time we fixed that highway, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There's so many others. I was at Raymore, went through Raymore the other day. I don't know what highway that is. Anybody been west lately, of Raymore? You're lucky if you can go 30, 40 kilometres an hour without knocking a wheel off. That's the reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we came up with our highway hotline to . . . by the way, is still . . . the phones are ringing constantly. And you can win a wheel alignment. Phone in, tell us which is the worst highway in the province, you could win a wheel alignment. With any luck we'll get the Highways minister to sit on and judge which highway is worst.

Mr. Speaker, I think I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about the third party. I guess I would be remiss. I'd like to just talk about the third party for a minute, Mr. Speaker. A number of people over there have spent their full time today not talking about what Saskatchewan needs, not talking about what this problem of vision we have for this province. They've talked about the Saskatchewan Party. I think mainly because they can hear footsteps.

But I think they neglected to mention some of the problems that this government has. And one of the problems being that the third party is going left, left, left . . . in fact, I'm not sure they've passed the government opposite. And I think where they may be sitting and might hurt the government of the day is that we might have another new party in this province. And it could be called the green libbers -- the Liberals and the Green Party, because if the Liberal Party, the third party, goes any farther left, they're going to be right over there with the Green

Party. So don't be running down new parties. There may be more on the scene to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to go on and on, but I know some of my colleagues would like to get up. They don't want to miss the chance to talk about the things we have.

I guess, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe that what we need in this province, number one is lower taxes. We've got to get our economy going. High taxes drives people out of this province; it drives investment out of this province. We've got to remove the walls.

Just like The Farm Security Act, just like the high taxes, we're creating walls around the province of Saskatchewan, the problem being is that there's holes in it letting the people out. It is not letting them come back in and invest in this province. The only time they come back is on long weekends and it's bad on Sunday nights to see them leave. Most of these are our kids and grandkids.

You know, they say we shouldn't compare ourselves with Alberta, but when you think about it, why not? We've got oil; we've got gas; we've got uranium; we've got coal; potash; we've got agriculture. What does Alberta have that we don't? They've got foresight; they've got lower taxes. They've got a vision for how you let business operate and get out of the road. And that's what we've got to do in this province.

(1930)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, until we lower taxes, until we take these walls down around this province, we will be stuck at a million people. Farm aid was a good example. If we had two or three million people, can you imagine how we could have addressed that problem quickly? Alberta did. Even Manitoba have nothing. They haven't got anything compared to what we have and yet taxes are lower in Manitoba than Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was disappointed in the Throne Speech. I'm sure I'm going to be disappointed in the budget, unless of course it happens to be an election-goody budget which will probably be never passed. A lot of goodies in it will never be passed and an election will be called. All I can say to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is bring it on. We're ready for the election. Let the polls say what they want. Let the actual voter tell us what they think. We're ready.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to annually get up in my seat here in the legislature and to take some time to review some of the things that have passed in the constituency, some of the things that have been done provincially and that have affected my constituency, and also to take a look at the proposals from the Throne Speech, see how they fit in and how it would affect, I believe it would affect, our constituents.

Before I get into that, Mr. Speaker, I notice that when the opposition members get up to speak, particularly the Tories

from the side opposite, that they often like to use Alberta as an example.

An Hon. Member: — Often? All the time.

Mr. Kowalsky: — My colleague says that it's becoming more than just often, it becomes a sort of a bad habit with them. Mr. Speaker, there are things that have happened in Alberta which all of us might sometimes envy. I suppose nobody would give up . . . Nobody would have given away the fact that if you were given some sweet oil as was found in Leduc in the early '50s . . .

However, Mr. Speaker, it's not just what you're given, it's what you do with what you're given. And when it comes to Alberta, Mr. Speaker, there's a trend that's happening there that I would not be proud of and I would be very concerned with. I'm concerned with the fact that it has some spillover effect even to us in Saskatchewan.

What am I referring to, Mr. Speaker? Here is a headline from a newspaper called *The Province*, March 10, and the headline says "Growing gap between rich and poor spells trouble". Now what this refers to is an article written by Jim McNulty — he writes on national affairs in these papers, Mr. Speaker — and he talks about what a Toronto economist Armine Yalnizyan published in an extensive report which . . . for the Centre for Social Justice.

Now the first thing that Mr. McNulty does is he makes a statement here that these words are not that of a New Democrat politician or a union boss or any left-wing think-tank. These words and these statements and these conclusions that he came to were by this particular Toronto economist.

He says this:

In Canada, the rich are enormously richer. In 1973 the wealthiest 10 percent of families with kids under 18 made 21 more times more than the poorest 10 percent of the families. But by '96, moneyed families made more than 314 times more than the poorest.

Mr. Speaker, in 1973 the gap between the rich and the poor was about 18 to 21 times in terms of salary. That has magnified, that has leaped to a figure of 314 times more. That's what's happened. In other words, the middle class is shrinking, Mr. Speaker.

But he goes on to say here that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing faster in Alberta than in any other part of the country. That is not something to be proud of. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing faster than anywhere else in the country. That is in Alberta.

Alberta also has the largest wage gender gap in Canada, where women earn only 68 per cent of men's average salaries.

And, Mr. Speaker, the great Alberta that the members opposite are so proud of — the province with all the money, all the money — what are they doing? They have the highest single rate . . . highest rate of single moms in poverty — 71.4 per cent, according to the study done by Armine Yalnizyan for the

Centre for Social Justice.

Mr. Speaker, that does not speak well for a province, for any province. And it certainly doesn't speak well for one of the wealthiest provinces in the country. And if there's any mission that I feel still needs to be addressed in the country, that is one of the things that needs to be addressed, and that is to . . . that growing gap between the rich and the poor in the country. And at the same time, what is happening when that grows is that the middle class is shrinking. Without a good strong middle class, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to maintain a democratic system. A democratic system . . . In a democratic system people need to have access to information, they have to have time to ponder the information, they have to have time with which to act on the information in a democratic fashion, volunteering their activities and using community-based organizations with which to implement good policies. Mr. Speaker, that remark I wanted to make because it was following close on some of the remarks made by the Tories opposite and I thought it ought to be addressed immediately.

Mr. Speaker, I want to advise that I will be supporting the Speech from the Throne. It was a good speech. It reflects Saskatchewan values. It speaks to hope. It speaks to hope in the future, Mr. Speaker, and it was built on successes of past years.

Mr. Speaker, we've come a long way here in Saskatchewan since 1991. No longer are we referred to as Canada's basket case. Why? Because with the prudence of this government, the government which I support, we have created a situation where we are now free from fiscal slavery, fiscal bondage.

We're not totally free, Mr. Speaker, but we're free enough to be able to function. We're free enough to be able to provide extra, for example over the last few years, an extra \$80 million to health care when it was needed; an extra \$70 million to fight forest fires when it was needed, Mr. Speaker; an extra \$140 million to farmers just this last year, Mr. Speaker.

And that's on top of providing modest wage increases to employees in all departments. Wage increases consistently in Saskatchewan, modest as they be, but not decreases such as was done in the Tory provinces on both sides of Saskatchewan. Our civil servants, Mr. Speaker, deserve praise and deserve commendation for the work and their efforts and the co-operation that they gave to the rest of the province, everybody coming together when we were in tough times. They deserve credit for that. They've pulled through, and in some cases when the loads were extraordinarily heavy. And now we are fortunately in a position where we are able to consider suggestions and weigh them out and draw priorities, whether they be on tax reductions or debt repayments, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that they also deserve credit for it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Before I go into more detail, Mr. Speaker, I am reminded of the story that was spoken earlier today by the member from Estevan. He talked very briefly about a glass before being placed before a person. When the glass . . . There was a glass of water, Mr. Speaker, and he asked whether the glass, which was about half full of water, whether it was half full or considered to be half empty. Mr. Speaker, he said it

depends on your point of view whether it's half full or half empty.

Mr. Speaker, I will refer to that again in a moment but when I was pondering as what to say here, I thought to myself how are things in Saskatchewan; how are things in Canada; how are they overall? Is the glass half empty or is the glass half full?

And I want to just take a moment and look at things by going back, not over just a day at a time but looking at almost a lifetime's worth. And when I do that, I think that we here in Saskatchewan — perhaps in all of Canada, but particularly in Saskatchewan — have a rare human experience, very rare when you look at it on a global and a long-time schedule. That is in my lifetime, Mr. Speaker. I have not experienced a war; I have not experienced pestilence; I haven't experienced famine; I haven't experienced any kind of major political disaster — we came close to it once in my mind you.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, with small exceptions, small periods of time, we've experienced steady growth; we've experienced liberty; we have an extraordinarily high standard of living. Compared to most places in the world, Mr. Speaker, we are a favoured province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — And we live in a favoured nation and we are a favoured population. Now how come, Mr. Speaker? Did this all happen by accident? Was it luck? Was it because of the brilliant decisions of our leaders? Think of it, Mr. Speaker. How come? Because, to borrow a title from a current movie, when it comes right down to it, life is beautiful here. Here we are in Saskatchewan — quiet place, remote, unassuming. We've got time to laugh, to play, to work, and to develop.

Mr. Speaker, the total answer to that question is beyond what I want to deal with today, but I do want to say one thing about it. I believe that our favourite place here in the world would not have happened if we were not the benefactors of good governance, good overall governance. Governance which has in it a balance of good public policies. Governance which balances the structuring for economic success with being socially progressive. Governance which balances the taxation system so that there's room to pay for education, to pay for health, to pay for social services, and yet be globally competitive.

These are the type of policies, Mr. Speaker, that provide for wealth creation and then wealth distribution. These are the type of policies — policies I've experienced in my lifetime — that provide for programs for people. And it gives us freedom from want; it gives us freedom for creativity; freedom for us to self-actualize and to pursue our dreams.

Mr. Speaker, policies like these are talked about in this year's Throne Speech. They're policies for people. They are policies that are based on the people's agenda, Mr. Speaker. The people's agenda in this year's Throne Speech are in four main areas — the areas of education, health, safety at home, jobs and the economy.

I was particularly pleased to see that the Throne Speech had a lot to say about education. Why, Mr. Speaker? As a teacher, I

know that education holds the key to our future and it's the key to our well-being. It's the key to our ability to trade in the future; it's a key to our ability to research; it's the key to our ability to apply research; and our key to a developed, technologically based society.

Mr. Speaker, what is being done in our school is very important to our well-being. I think that sometimes it goes underemphasized, because it's in our schools that our teachers are faced with the task, the task of challenging our children's brains to develop. Taking a child from this level, and helping that child achieve this level. Preparing our youth to take our province and our country, Mr. Speaker, from this level to achieve at this level.

(1945)

Mr. Speaker, ordinarily throne speeches speak in terms only of one year. This one speaks for a little longer. A Confucian prophet . . . pardon me, a Confucian proverb reads something like this, Mr. Speaker: if you think in terms of one year, plant a seed; if you think in terms of 10 years, plant trees; but if you think in terms of 100 years, teach the people.

Mr. Speaker, this budget speaks to the long term. It pays attention to education. Let's take a look at some of the things that it does, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to education. First thing it does, Mr. Speaker, it mentions a bit about where we've been in education. But what I want to turn to particularly is the comment on page 4 of the Throne Speech. It says:

During this session of the Legislature, my government will work closely with parents, teachers and school boards, to move forward on some of the key priorities facing our school system:

Making sure vulnerable children get the best possible start, through stronger pre-kindergarten programs.

It's right from the start, Mr. Speaker — children from the start.

Second:

Making sure children get full benefit from their schools, by implementing Saskatchewan's core curriculum and making it more accessible to parents and teachers.

That is about three-quarters done, Mr. Speaker; maybe 90 per cent done in most of the schools. But it's a job that is not yet finished.

Number three:

Making sure (that) students can handle the basic tools of tomorrow's economy, by providing broader access to computers and new technologies.

And last of all, Mr. Speaker:

And investing appropriately to ensure that all (of our children) . . . learn in good, safe schools.

There's one more important thing that this Throne Speech does

when it comes to education for K to 12. It says that we will launch a Role of Schools Task Force, Mr. Speaker. We will launch a Role of Schools task force. I believe that this is a very timely thing for us to do here in Saskatchewan now, Mr. Speaker. We have progressed through several stages in education, K to 12. We have gone through implementation of what is known as the *Directions* report, started about 20 years ago. This led to the development of core curriculum.

But what's happened, we now have a new situation in our schools and we have a new situation in our society. Schools are now being asked to do more. Schools are asked now to integrate special-needs students. Schools have to deal with the information age. They have to deal with children at risk. We have things in schools now that we never heard of before — attention deficit disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome. Mr. Speaker, the context of schools has changed. The context of school in societies has changed.

The information age. When these other things were put into place, Mr. Speaker, there still was a Soviet Union. There was not such a thing as Aboriginal self-government. Nunavut . . . none of us knew that Nunavut existed. And now we have the largest land claim in the world implemented in 1999. We went through oil crises, two of them, shortages in the '70s and gluts in the '90s. We've gone through globalization. Globalization of trade, Mr. Speaker, globalization of information. RRSPs (Registered Retirement Savings Plan) didn't exist, Mr. Speaker, when we first started the *Directions* report. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) didn't exist.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the role of schools task force. That, I believe, is the people's agenda. It comes at the right time; it's a good policy. Mr. Speaker, what a contrast with the Tory proposal to freeze funding to education and health, where they say and their leader says that they will allow for inflation only. Well I tell this to the Tories, go and tell that to the teachers that you're going to freeze education. Go and tell that to school board members. Go and tell that to the parents. I wouldn't want to fight an election on that kind of a platform.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to deal with post-secondary education. I want to compliment my friend, the member from Meadow Lake, who has taken on the role of ministry of the Post-Secondary Education because as minister, he has also initiated a review. They have set up regional colleges, post-secondary education, and skills training review committee. And this, the job of this committee, Mr. Speaker, is to examine the colleges' future and the unique role that they have in the post-secondary system.

It looks to position colleges to support the goals of the Saskatchewan training strategy and to position regional colleges to meet the needs of learners, employers, and labour-market needs of the next millennium.

To do this, Mr. Speaker, they're going to secure input from staff, from students, from business, from REDAs (regional economic development authority), First Nations, and Metis, and anybody else who may be interested.

Mr. Speaker, the colleges of Saskatchewan are not a small thing. They serve 30,000 residents in a variety of ways. This

review, Mr. Speaker, will fulfill the mandate of The Regional Colleges Act which asks for a review every five years, and it will serve the colleges well into the future.

I'm also pleased, Mr. Speaker, that the Youth Futures program, which was established in 1997 as a pilot project, is positioned and is placed in Prince Albert, my town. This program, Mr. Speaker, is a community-based . . . is run by a community-based organization. It's overseen by a steering committee with representation from a wide variety of interests in Prince Albert which include the human service agencies, businesses, secondary and post-secondary education representatives, and First Nations.

Now what is it, Mr. Speaker? It takes young people who would ordinarily be at risk, who would ordinarily end up on welfare rolls, and it requires them to plan their future and to take appropriate action. It starts with an assessment of their skills, their abilities, and ambitions. And from this, they develop a plan to achieve their desired goals. That plan would include appropriate programs and services.

Now some of the youth in this program may need to address personal or family issues before they begin formal training or education. This is also provided for. And these participants receive a youth allowance which parallels the level of financial support provided by the provincial training allowance.

Mr. Speaker, we're into the second year. I'm looking forward to the continuation of this program. There are between 300 and 350 youth involved in this program.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn now to the topic of jobs and the economy — one of the pillars of this Throne Speech. I believe it was wise, Mr. Speaker, for the government to deal — to take this topic — jobs and the economy, as one of the four main areas of the people's agenda.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes right down to it, most of us gain a lot of our identity from our jobs, from our work. Quite often when you meet somebody, one of the two questions that are asked is: what do you do? The other one may be: where do you live? It's our custom and it's probably a nice one. But it points out how important jobs are.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what's happened in Saskatchewan over the last while? Since 1992, Mr. Speaker, this government has set a goal to create 30,000 jobs and it's done exactly that, Mr. Speaker. It set a goal to create 30,000 jobs and it has created 30,000 jobs. Our record is particularly good with young people, Mr. Speaker.

But when we did the job creation here, Mr. Speaker, it was done in a sensible way. It was done in a balanced way. And the results of this, of the policies that were implemented, the economic policies, we see that our population is growing steadily.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, between '92 and '97, Saskatchewan led the nation in economic growth. And it's still growing today. By doing this, Mr. Speaker, we are now able to be paying down some of the debt from 70 per cent of the GDP (gross domestic product) to 40 per cent today. There are now more people

working in good full-time jobs in Saskatchewan than ever before. That was last year's record.

Employment is at a 16-year low. Mr. Speaker, a recent Alberta study ranked Saskatchewan number one in youth employment for three years running. There are people coming back to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now what has happened is we are building partnerships, Mr. Speaker, with northern communities and with aboriginal communities — a very significant thing to do because this is where the youth x500

Now what has happened is we are building partnerships, Mr. Speaker, with northern communities and with aboriginal communities — a very significant thing to do because this is where the youth unemployment was the highest. And as a result of our taxation policies, as a result of the planning shown by this government, people are investing capital in our economy. In 1998 we saw \$7 billion in new investment alone come to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this year, as I mentioned earlier, it was the deliberate decision of the Government of Saskatchewan to help farm producers which were badly affected by the drought situation and also by the weak hog prices. As I mentioned earlier, our government has committed \$140 million to assist these producers, and they will pay 40 per cent of the proposed federal program to cover the 40 per cent of Canada's farmland, Mr. Speaker, and that's only using 3 per cent of Canada's taxpayers which reside in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this was possible because our province has diversified a lot. We heard Grant Devine, when he was in power, speak a lot about diversification. We didn't see much diversification, but we heard a lot about it. What has happened in the last eight years, Mr. Speaker, is the farmers have diversified just tremendously, Mr. Speaker, and as a result we were able to get through some of these tough times, as last year with the decreased oil prices — decreased commodity prices all through really — but particularly oil and wheat.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take a few moments to look at a few more statistical indicators about our economy, particularly take a look at how much Saskatchewan has grown from the period of '92 to 1998. In the press, Mr. Speaker, you don't get much of this. You will get every individual little story where people set up complaints, but you don't get the good stories — you don't get the success stories, Mr. Speaker. What statistics do is they even out all of the stories, the good stories and the difficult stories, and they give you the overall average. That's why it's important to take a look at them. It gives you the overall direction that your province is going.

Youth employment, Mr. Speaker. What has happened to youth employment in Saskatchewan, '92-98? It's increased, Mr. Speaker, by 7,100 people; 9.7 per cent during that period. Way more than Manitoba's, Mr. Speaker. Way more than Manitoba's. And in particular, female employment in Saskatchewan rose by 4,100 — again way more than Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened to personal income per capita in Saskatchewan, and how does it compare with Manitoba and Alberta? In Saskatchewan, from '92-97, personal income grew

by 11 per cent. How does that compare with Manitoba and Alberta? Saskatchewan grows by 11 per cent, Manitoba by 9.4 per cent, Alberta by 9.3 per cent — '92-97, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of that.

(2000)

Mr. Speaker, what about average weekly earnings? Saskatchewan's average weekly earnings in '97 was 12.1 per cent higher than in 1992. Now how does Manitoba's comparison at that time? Manitoba, at that time, while Saskatchewan up 12.1 per cent in increase, Manitoba's increase was 7.1 per cent. Well it would have been nice if Manitoba would have been at 12.1 per cent as well, Mr. Speaker, but the point I'm trying to make here, Mr. Speaker, is that Saskatchewan is not slouching. In many cases Saskatchewan is leading, Mr. Speaker, and that is after coming from behind and having to take care of that monstrous debt that was given to us by the Devine government.

Mr. Speaker, what happens in the case of child . . . the child poverty rate. This is something, Mr. Speaker, that is not a thing that is . . . that any Canadian should be proud of. And when I started my address here I mentioned what the situation was in Alberta. It was drastic. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is in much better shape when it comes to child poverty. Still not good enough, not nearly where we should be. Still not good enough, but compared to Alberta and Manitoba, we are way better off.

Mr. Speaker, there is a graph compiled from StatsCanada. It was published in this book that was delivered to every MLA and every MLA should take a look at it. But this graph talks about the increase in number of poor children in Canada. Is the number of poor children in Canada increasing or decreasing? Now we'd all like to think that it was decreasing. But what this graph says that since from 1989 to 1985, 1989 to 1985 — this is not my research, Mr. Speaker, this is not our caucus research. These are figures taken from StatsCanada and put into this right-wing magazine here called "The Future of Work in Canada" called "RoadKill" . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . This is from 1989 to 1995.

All right, now what's happened. Percentages, by percentages, in Ontario one of the wealthiest part of our country, the increase in the number of poor children in Canada increased by 99 per cent — 99 per cent — from 254,000 to 506,000. Ontario has the worst record in this particular case.

Go down to Alberta. How much did it increase in Alberta according to this? From 116,000 to 156,000, which comes out to 34 per cent.

Now guess which province got the best record — still not very good, Mr. Speaker — but which one has the best record? Well at 7 per cent it's Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. But even here we have a situation where the number of children in those years increased from 54,000 to 58,000.

Mr. Speaker, that statistic in itself is one of the main reasons that we need to have a government in power which thinks about balancing social programs, cares about people, and does not care exclusively about the bottom line and measure everything exclusively on the bottom line.

Mr. Speaker, lastly let me turn to the concept of health care. I want to talk about my feeling about health care and how important medicare is to this country, and particularly the role that I believe we have to play when it comes to managing health care. I want to start out with the proposition that says that Saskatchewan has the best health care system in the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — I say that, Mr. Speaker, because it's based on . . . first of all it was started here, but it's based on and follows and leads the Canada Health Act which is the federal legislation which sets down some basic principles about medicare and about health care. It says that . . . And these principles are comprehensiveness, universality, accessibility, portability, and perhaps most importantly, Mr. Speaker, public administration.

When you look at how anybody here has access to health care, compared to anyplace else in the world, really, you'd wonder why other people still have a different system. However, Mr. Speaker, trying to change medicare or change a health system or any kind of a governmental system is like trying to turn the *Titanic* around in the middle of the Saskatchewan River. You know, you just go through a few bumps and sometimes you might get stuck.

Mr. Speaker, we were able to upkeep our health care system here and continue to provide more dollars for it. When we got into government we spent, in our budget, about 1.5 billion. Right now it's up to about \$1.76 billion spent on health care, and rising.

And that was . . . And when you look at the record of that, when you look at the record of the Saskatchewan payments, when Tommy Douglas and Woodrow Lloyd instituted medicare, of course, they paid the entire 100 per cent of medicare. Later in, I believe it was in 1962, when the Liberal government implemented the task force recommendations that John Diefenbaker set up, the federal government picked up 50 per cent of the costs. But what happened is when this government, this current government that we have in power now, took over, they carried out the agenda of the Conservatives before them and reduced it, reduced their payment to merely 13 per cent. So the Saskatchewan taxpayer had to pick it up.

Now fortunately, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very happy about this, that after 10 or 15 years of that right-wing rhetoric and moving the agenda towards globalization and free trade and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), and hearing nothing but that and reduced taxation, finally — at the urging, I must say, of our Premier — the federal government has come back at least a little bit and they've increased . . . they told us they're increasing the payments by about \$70 million a year, which brings it back up from 13 per cent to, my calculations, it's about 18 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the amount may not be that great, but the change in direction is very, very significant for the Canadian people and for Saskatchewan people. The change in direction that we no longer are driven solely by tax cutting and cutting back on benefits to people, but instead looking at ways to help out and help the province increase its services that it provides to health

care, is a very significant thing.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, because people ask this question: well, wouldn't it be cheaper if we went to a privatized system? Wouldn't it be handier? They get this idea from various places — largely I think from the US (United States) media. But the public would like to know, Mr. Speaker, if you take all of the medical services that are provided in the United States, it costs them about 13 per cent of their gross national product. Then if you compare that with what it costs in Canada, our cost is much more efficient. It comes out to be about 10 per cent of our gross national product.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, when Conrad Black — who has nearly now got the monopoly in all of the papers in Saskatchewan and many in Canada — when he was asked to comment about medicare, that he said this in the *Saturday Night* magazine in 1998, February 1998, and I quote. This is what he thinks about medicare.

The policy has proved to have completely failed in its objectives and to have been overwhelmingly unaffordable.

That is that guru, the wise Mr. Conrad Black, speaking about medicare. I'll repeat that. Here is what he said:

The policy has proved to have completely failed in its objectives and to have been overwhelmingly unaffordable.

Have you ever heard anything that is more untrue? Have you ever heard anything that's got more hoovey, Mr. Speaker? That was him speaking about our medicare system.

Mr. Speaker, it quite amazed me when I looked at some of the things that are available to us here in Saskatchewan and how we've progressed in this and what's happening, happened to the demands on our system.

Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago the government sponsored or the government paid for, through government, and our doctors performed 77,000 operations. Last year they performed 91,000 operations. Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago the number . . . over the last period of 10 years, the number of hip and knee operations went up by 87 per cent. Right now there are 88,000 families — about 30 per cent of the families in Saskatchewan — who access the drug system in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, these numbers are kind of staggering. You often wonder how you can even accomplish that with the tax money that we're putting into it. But there's more. Mr. Speaker, there are now 11,000 cataract surgeries per year conducted in Saskatchewan. That's up about 300 per cent from 10 years ago. There are 35,000 people that access the medicare system daily in Saskatchewan; 35,000 people go to some part of our health system here in Saskatchewan every day. How many people visit physicians, Mr. Speaker? Do you think you might visit a physician once a year, twice a year? Mr. Speaker, there are 4.6 million office visits to Saskatchewan physicians annually. That's like an average of 4.6 per person, yearly.

That all adds up to something, Mr. Speaker, that requires considerable management, considerable skill and diligence on the part of the administrators, on the part of the board members,

on the part of the people in the Department of Health, Mr. Speaker — all of that, to manage that on the budget of \$1.76 billion.

It's something, Mr. Speaker, that when I talk about medicare to my children or youth anywhere, that they sort of take for granted, and they feel that it always was there and it might always continue to be there. Mr. Speaker, the fastest way to lose medicare is to lose control of the fiscal purse of the province. That's the fastest way. And if the federal government starves the provinces, and if the debt created by the Tories was still started by the provinces, medicare would have been threatened. And if the people of Saskatchewan hadn't saw fit to get rid of the Devine government and put into place a government which cared for social programs like medicare. Medicare could have been threatened.

Mr. Speaker, I have one more quote I want to refer to. And that is the talks to the future, the future direction of medicare; and where medicare is headed; and where we should be putting our dollars, our medicare dollars; and what direction we should go.

Should we be funding, Mr. Speaker, excess beds as some people are requesting; extra beds in every corner of the province? Should we be funding preventative programs or there is some combination of this that we should be funding?

(2015)

I have here, Mr. Speaker, a quotation from a speech by one Richard Lamm, he was a former governor of Colorado. He talks about some research that the US Department of Health and Human Services had in their report. And it says this: "For a healthy nation, clinical medicine however, is credited . . ." I'm just ahead of myself here for a minute, Mr. Speaker. The first thing he says is: "That over his lifetime, the system in the States and here has added 30 years to human life expectancy." Our human life expectancy in the year 1900 was about 50; right now it's very close to 80. We can expect that . . . I believe it's 79.6 or 79.8.

So he speaks to that 30-year increase. He says:

For a healthy nation, clinical medicine however is credited with only 5 of the 30 years that have been added to life expectancy since the turn of the century. The other 25 years are due to a higher standard of living, cleaner water, soap, refrigeration, safer jobs (etc., etc., etc.)

Mr. Speaker, a job for everybody, good housing, some leisure time, time for parents to spend with their children — those are the things that we can continue to focus on if we want to increase our longevity and increase our record in this province as being one of the best places to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention how the government is reacting in the Throne Speech to the demands, tomorrow's demands in health care.

The Throne Speech directly states that the new money coming in from the federal government will be used to address waiting

times. It will be used to address cancer treatment. It will be used to address women's health issues, and to work to spend less on administration.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the direction that's been set by this Speech from the Throne. I also looked at some of the things that were accomplished in my constituency over the two terms of office during which I served, Mr. Speaker, and I have a pretty nice list. I think I'm going to save it for another time. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for this opportunity to bring my remarks to this legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and honour to rise in the Assembly today in response to the Speech from the Throne.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give greetings to all the people of Saskatchewan, and most particularly to my own constituency of Rosthern. It's a very special constituency, and I think as far as rural constituency goes, it's by far the most vibrant and exciting one that we happen to have in Saskatchewan.

So many communities in that constituency, Mr. Speaker, every one of those communities is growing. There's not one of those communities that's dying. And we've had a number of new ventures that are taking place, and we'll talk a bit about those a little later on.

But there's probably one thing that needs to be underlined right at the start. People are saying well, it's kind of nice that you live in a constituency that doesn't have towns that are shrinking and schools that are closing. The interesting fact that needs to be noted, Mr. Speaker, is that that constituency has never in its life voted socialist, and I think that says a whole lot, says a whole lot. And we look at what's happened in Saskatchewan in the last while we've had some socialist government — unfortunately for the last 50 years — and that's why we haven't grown.

As a province, we're at the same place we were back in the 1940s. Population hasn't grown. Same thing. We've been shipping them out. Question comes, question comes . . . where have all the babies gone? Because about 1 million people have been in Saskatchewan and making babies for the last 50 years. Where are they? They're not in Saskatchewan. They're in British Columbia. They're in Alberta. They're in Manitoba. And with a socialist government we can't get over a million.

Take a good look at my constituency has never voted socialist and see what that sort of an attitude does. It's brought it to the top of all rural constituencies without a single community decreasing in size. Schools that are full and overflowing. And if this government that we have over there just did something for those schools they'd have some decent buildings as well. But we'll get into that in a minute.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that this government has shown absolutely no leadership or vision for the future of Saskatchewan. And I'm referring specifically to what we saw on the Throne Speech. It has become more

apparent now than ever before that this government does not have the best in mind for the people of Saskatchewan. It's a disastrous Throne Speech. Disastrous just because it doesn't do anything, doesn't do anything.

In their Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, the member's opposite claim they are dedicated to health care and education. But we're going to look a little later on this evening at what that dedication has got, and it hasn't managed to bring anything to the people of Saskatchewan. And we'll take a substantial amount of time to clarify that for the people opposite because they haven't quite caught on to this point.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has the second latest tax freedom day in the country, July 2, which means that for some strange reasons they've been collecting all these taxes, have no money. It's spendthrift, misspent, not knowing what they're going to do. And we'll go into that, Mr. Speaker, we'll go into that. We'll talk about where the money for highways goes, but where it should go, and those are not the same places.

Mr. Speaker, there's another area of serious concern that member's opposite did not even acknowledge in the Throne Speech and I just mention that's the highways. Nowhere else has the failure of this government become as obvious to everybody else in North America than in our highways. They are the laughing stock of North America. We don't get to laugh over them because we have to drive over them. But they're a disaster, they're dangerous. When you have large hunks of highway coming through and missing people as they're sitting in their cars driving down the highway — dangerous. Ducks swimming in the middle of the highway in the potholes. In fact is on 312 they don't even have to look for a pothole. They can just swim in the ruts and just keep going east or west.

That crumbling system is there. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan depend on those highways. And they're getting worse. They're getting worse, getting far worse.

We had a member opposite from the NDP over there, Mr. Speaker, make some statement the other day about the fact that her family and other families had come from Europe, come from here to get land to get going in farming, and what in the world would happen if the NDP weren't here to keep them here. Well I would suggest it's been the NDP that's chased them out. Why don't we have people to take over the farms? There's no one left in the province to take them over.

I spent some time in a coffee shop in one of my communities talking with a group of farmers living in one area. Probably about 60, 62 years of age was the average, and there wasn't anyone except one young person around to take over those farms. You've chased them all out. And once they're outside, they're not going to come back in here and have to go ahead and defend the kind of highways they have, defend the kind of school systems that you've created in this particular province.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. Order! Now hon. members . . . Order! I'll ask all hon. members to come to order. The hon. member is a veteran member and recognizes of course that he is to direct his debate through the Chair and not to — order — no to other members across the floor, and I think we see the reason for that. And I'll ask the hon. member to direct

his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that direction. I'd like to spend a little bit of time on education because it seemed to be something that attracted their attention just for a moment, Mr. Speaker. And it's hard to keep their attention because just as they, you know, run amok when they run the province, they can't seem to pay attention to a particular speech, either.

There's a number of things we have to do with education. We have to put some confidence back in education from the people of this province. When they hear that for some reason, whatever it is, that the math scores in this province, the students are dead last in Canada . . . Mr. Speaker, that's not because our students aren't smart, and that's not because their teachers aren't good. But there's got to be something else in there, and I think the Department of Education needs to look at that and say, Mr. Speaker, what in the world do they need to do to correct that problem. And I don't see them doing very much. I don't see them doing anything.

About the only thing that this province knows, Mr. Speaker, that this government has done in education, that is off-load onto the property tax payer the load that they should be carrying. And our people in rural Saskatchewan, in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, when they get their tax notices, it used to be they'd look at that tax notice and they would see that the majority of that amount they would have to pay were going to go for roads, for runoffs, for taking care of rodents, whatever they happen to do out there, but they'd be taking care of that.

And there's a small amount for education because the province, Mr. Speaker, was taking care of its own responsibility. And they felt a small amount for education — their kids went to school, that was fair enough.

Now they get the tax notice, Mr. Speaker, and the balance is shifted. And they're paying a major portion of the tax load, an unfair portion of the tax load, Mr. Speaker. And that needs to change. In my particular constituency we have, Mr. Speaker, a school in Martensville that's so full that the teachers have lost their staff room because it has become a classroom. Teachers are now eating their lunches between the rows and the stacks in the library. And it makes an awful mess of the books. The Minister of Education needs to pay some attention to that, Mr. Speaker. That needs to be taken care of.

Osler gym, Mr. Speaker, has been crumbling for a decade — can't get any funding for it. Rosthern doesn't even have a gym. The local people, Mr. Speaker, have raised nearly \$200,000. They met with the Department of Education who promised nothing and left. The local people paying 60 per cent of the tax load, Mr. Speaker, having raised almost \$200,000 for a gym. and the department people just kind of shrugged and said, well I don't know what we can do and away they went.

Hepburn school, another growing school — in fact they're all growing as I said earlier on — has a classroom you literally step through the floors, and they can't get the money to fix it. And what's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, is that I look across to the people over there, the NDP. It's not that they are devoid of teachers in there that should be able to understand the problem,

they have quite a number of them in there, but somehow they must not be able to influence whoever the power brokers there are.

Power brokers are probably the Premier and the Deputy Premier, but we'll say a bit more about their brokering of power when we discuss where they live and what the crime stats in their own constituencies are all about. We'll see how fine they're doing there, but it was one of the NDP members, Mr. Speaker, that about an hour or so ago spoke of the increased responsibilities that teachers were getting, and yes they are. And it happened to be a teacher that said it over there. Strange thing he didn't seem to realize, Mr. Speaker, it was his NDP government that was putting those loads on to the teachers. It came right into his own area, but he couldn't see that.

While we're discussing the Premier and the Deputy Premier, I think we have to discuss a few things about the Premier, Mr. Speaker. And that is, the question that comes up so often is: where is he? Where is he? Sometime ago, Mr. Speaker, we had the Prime Minister of Canada come to our province, and the Premier was going to go ahead and have a meeting with him, and he did. But what did we ever hear that was raised? Would have been an ideal opportunity to tell the people of Saskatchewan, I'm sticking up for you, and I will tell the Prime Minister what our difficulties are and what we need and what we expect from you — and those two would be much the same.

(2030)

But we never heard a thing. In four years, I have not once heard the Premier address our Prime Minister and say, this is the situation in agriculture. In fact, when the agriculture situation got serious, who in the world did he send down to Ottawa to negotiate? He sent out his Agriculture minister, the fellow who said, Mr. Speaker, there is no problem. You know, we have areas that haven't had a crop in three, four years: Neilburg, the whole area around there. But there is no problem.

We have people who had hogs who were losing thousands of dollars a day, Mr. Speaker. But the Agriculture minister said we have no problem. That's who our Premier sends down to negotiate on our behalf, Mr. Speaker. And no wonder we got as little as we did get. Just amazing we got anything, just amazing.

Goes down there and he tells the people, we have no problem in Saskatchewan. And we have our budget balanced, and we have a surplus. Well with that kind of an introductory statement, Mr. Speaker, who in the world would give us any help? First we tell them there's no problem, Mr. Speaker. And then we tell them that our financial situation is a piece of cake. I wouldn't have given us any money either. How ineffective can you possibly be?

No problems, we had no problem in agriculture. We had no Premier present. What about justice? What about justice?

How often do we hear our Premier saying to the Prime Minister, we've got to get a few things changed, when we're talking about crime in our cities.

And Saskatchewan needs that dealt with, Mr. Speaker. We need that dealt with when we have cities that happen to be number

one in car thefts in Canada; when we have cities in Saskatchewan that happen to be number one break-in capitals in Canada. We need that addressed. We didn't hear a thing from him. Heard next to nothing from our Justice minister either.

Speaking of silence from our Justice department, Mr. Speaker, last year, 1998, was an opportunity for people in this province, if they wanted to, to apply for an FAC (Firearms Acquisition Certificate) which would last for five years. There were 1,000 people who applied for that one at the end of that year and it would last into the new system. Half a year after they had applied for those, they still hadn't received it because they had been sent down to someplace down East. They were waiting for half a year for their FACs.

Did we hear our Justice minister say one single word on that issue? Did he contact the firearm community and say: fellows, women, sportsmen, target shooters, I know that you're waiting for those FACs and this is what I'm doing and we'll have it solved this way in a short period of time? Not a word from them. For all I know, they're still waiting for those FACs. We have this unbelievable problem, Mr. Speaker, of silence over there when we need to speak up for something that's important to the people of Saskatchewan.

The Throne Speech — just a whole lot of nothing. What did it give to roads? What did it give to roads, highways? RMs (rural municipality) get more money to build all those roads they need for the heavier traffic for grain? No, nothing.

An Hon. Member: — No.

Mr. Heppner: — Is there more money to build up our primary highways?

An Hon. Member: — No.

Mr. Heppner: — No. There was a commitment made by that government, the NDP, Mr. Speaker, of how much they were going to spend every year over a certain period of years. They have been behind that every single year.

Now what unfortunately the people of Saskatchewan didn't know — or will know after they listen to the next sentence or two — is that they may have been under the perception from this particular government that all that money that was committed, and that part of it that they did adopt for highways, was going to build highways.

Well that's not correct. They've been hiring all kinds of bureaucrats and people sitting in offices working for the Department of Highways who haven't painted a stripe on the road. And you remember, Mr. Speaker, the fiasco about six, seven months ago, when this government was going to stop painting stripes on the highways . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Now that was a skunky idea if I ever heard one. So they're behind in their own commitment to highways; and the money that they do say they spend on highways, much of that doesn't go to highways.

It hires some people that they hope are going to work on this next election which will be something they'll have a very hard time doing when one of the national newspapers recently had a

poll on the status of premiers throughout Canada. And for a long time our Saskatchewan NDP Premier led his party by a substantial amount. Now they're down in the dismal thirties. Their Premier's down there with the party. He hasn't been that low in forever. His name could be Bob Rae for all the popularity he has in Saskatchewan. It could be Glen Clark, could be Glen Clark. All we would need is someone coming to his house with the lights flashing.

So what that Throne Speech did for roads was nothing, which is what is the underlying tone of that whole particular Throne Speech. What about health? What about health? Well, Mr. Speaker, I had the misfortune of needing our health care about a month or two ago, and I will say I received excellent care.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Now the credit for that care, Mr. Speaker, the credit for that care — as the NDP applaud for probably the first, what they thought was a compliment they've heard in a long time — went to the doctors and the nurses.

The health care is so shaky that when I was sent to Saskatoon by ambulance, my family physician, who said I should go down there for the care that I needed, had to go to Edmonton. When he got near North Battleford, he phoned Saskatoon just to make sure that I wasn't still in an ambulance, playing the little ambulance games between hospitals because he was fairly sure that that might happen.

So I ended up in the hospital in the emergency ward, and the doctor there had said I would have my procedure in about an hour and a half which is about one o'clock at night. And one of the nurses says, you're rather fortunate. We've had a person sitting here in emergency for two days waiting for his procedure — two days.

But there was something that happened before that, Mr. Speaker, that I think needs to be explained. We want to have confidence in our health care. That confidence is not there because unfortunately as I was in that ambulance driving that half hour to Saskatoon my concern was not how the operation would turn out or any of those sorts of things. It was: when I get there will I be able to get into emergency or will I have to play those games and maybe be sent off to who knows where?

No one in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, should have to have those worries when they're not feeling well and they're in an ambulance going for some special care. But in Saskatchewan that's there, and that feeling and that attitude has been created by that NDP government, Mr. Speaker. They need to take responsibility for it. They need to take responsibility for that.

We had an example in question period this morning, Mr. Speaker, of an individual who had to go to the United States for some care. Fortunately he was able to afford that. He comes back here and he needs some procedures taking place afterwards. And our Health minister wasn't prepared to promise that a Saskatchewan citizen, Mr. Speaker, could get that continued care here in Saskatchewan, even when it was available, as if they were being punished.

You dare look outside this province for some help and we will

punish you; we will take care away from you; we will make you go back to the United States for some more care. Two-tier health care, Mr. Speaker, two-tier health care. Our Minister of Health this morning showed it very directly. That's what we have, telling us that we have to go for more private care when we could take care of it out here. We could take care of it out here.

This government, Mr. Speaker, shown through this Throne Speech, is bankrupt; shown in their actions of how they treat people. They're arrogant. They have no ideas. They have no vision. We dare not let that group of people, Mr. Speaker, lead this province any longer. And the people of this province are saying the same sort of thing.

The fact is today, as the session continued, we received a number of phone calls, letters, and faxes saying, get on with it and get this group of people out of government; this province can't handle this any longer. And I challenge the people over there, call an election. We're ready. The people of Saskatchewan are ready and they're waiting for the opportunity to get rid of most of you, if not all of you.

I look at the member from Swift Current city, Mr. Speaker. He's one that's gone. There's no hope. I used to live in Swift Current. I know the people there, I've talked to them. They're just waiting for an opportunity. There happened to be a Sask Party nomination there and a hard-fought one, Mr. Speaker. I had phone calls from some individuals that I knew from Swift Current saying, I want to get involved — who do I contact? We have to get in on this and get rid of the NDP government in Saskatchewan; we'll start by doing that in our city, and that kind of a thing.

And that fire is being fanned all throughout this province, Mr. Speaker. And those people are gone after the next election. The people of Saskatchewan know it and the people over there know it; you can see it by the looks on their faces as they're hunkered down behind their desks wondering what's going to hit them next.

Job creation. I spoke earlier on about where have all the babies gone, Mr. Speaker. Well most of them have gone out of province. And we look at job creation — and this seems hard to believe. Because unfortunately, or fortunately, we tell a lot of jokes that involve other people from other provinces in this country. Newfoundland seems to be the butt of more jokes than anything else, Mr. Speaker. Well I'm afraid it's turned around. It's us now, Mr. Speaker. Newfoundland has created more jobs than we have.

Do you know, Mr. Speaker, hard to believe but Saskatchewan has lost jobs in the last year and Newfoundland created 6,100 jobs. I don't know what they're doing out there, but they're working. And where do we ship them off to? Elsewhere. Out of the province. And there should be no reason for that.

We have oil, Mr. Speaker; we have potash, unique to Saskatchewan. We have a good lumber industry. We have a unique uranium industry. We have steel processors, plus our agriculture and other industries in the cities. With all of that, Mr. Speaker, all of that — and I want to repeat that to make my next point: oil, potash, lumber, uranium, steel processors, and

everything else that's going on, and less than a million people — we can't create jobs. What is this government doing? They're devoid of any ideas; they're devoid of any vision. And thank goodness we'll soon be devoid of most of the NDP in this province.

Lost jobs in the past year. Unbelievable. Lost jobs. Every other province in Canada gained jobs. And I would hate to be in Newfoundland right now, sitting around in some gathering hole, and hear the jokes about Saskatchewan. All the jokes we've told in the past about Newfoundland, I'm sure they're turning around very quickly. And there's Saskatchewan, can't create one job in a whole year, Mr. Speaker, a whole year. There will be a few openings though when some of those people lose in the next election.

There was a statement made in a speech by one of the NDP within the last hour, Mr. Speaker, about the fantastic job that he thought Saskatchewan was doing with its care of children. Well there's a statistic that I think puts the actual face on that particular statement. Our infant mortality is 50 per cent higher than the national average. What a shame. What a shame. Fifty per cent higher than the national average. What have these people been doing? And they say, we give up.

Well I'm afraid there was 50 per cent more children gave up in this province than in any other place in Canada. It's a shame. It's an absolute shame that our children have to have the highest infant mortality in Canada by 50 per cent higher, Mr. Speaker, not just a little bit. And they say they can manage those sorts of things.

There was one of the NDP in their response to the throne who obviously has a great deal of difficulty with the English language, who came up with the statement that the Saskatchewan Party had said we would freeze spending on health care. That is a downright three-letter word, Mr. Speaker. It is definitely not the way it is. All they would have had to do is check the resolutions we've passed, checked our election platform, and the word "freeze" for health care is not in there, Mr. Speaker, is not in there.

(2045)

In fact there is going to be extra money put in every year and it's stated in there. And every single extra cent coming from the federal government will be going in there. And then to make sure that that pays off, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that every single dollar is well spent.

As I go throughout this province and as I spend some time in the hospitals, as I said I had, Mr. Speaker, spent some time late one night talking with a number of nurses, and they expressed some of the concerns about health care, and they had a question. They didn't know what the answer was but they had a question. And the question was this, Mr. Speaker: we're just not sure if all the money in health care is really being used as good as it could be or should be. These are front-line people who are in there seeing what's happening and they have some definite concerns.

And when I saw how hard they worked, how hard those nurses worked, it sure wasn't the fault of theirs because they're

working hard; they're doing double duty. But they had the feeling that somehow the money wasn't going where it should be going and wasn't being used effectively, and we need an audit to make sure that every cent is being used correctly.

However, Mr. Speaker, the NDP over there have appointed half the people to all the rural districts, to all the hospital organizations. No wonder they don't want to check where the money is going. They know where it's going because half the people on those committees are their appointed people and they hope they'll knock on doors for them come this next election. That's why that's happened, Mr. Speaker.

So we're going to have to get that administration cleared up so the people of this province are confident that when their tax dollars are going for health care — and they don't mind that happening — they know that that money has been used well and carefully. And I have no doubt, and very few people across this land, Mr. Speaker, have any doubt, that if we take that audit and then use the money carefully we'll find we have a lot more money to take care of the people in this particular province, so that our lines and our waiting lines will be shorter, and we don't have to play the silly little goofy games that the health department's playing.

The kind of things where they want to decide how many beds they have for a particular thing and they say, well you know, you had an average this last year of 10 people in a particular category; that's your average. So boom we'll pull out a bunch of beds and we'll now only give you 10 beds because that's been your average.

Well how in the world, Mr. Speaker, could you keep 10 beds full all the time? Now mind you living in this province probably helps. Driving on our highways probably helps. But I'm sure it's a situation that we realize is just manipulative. It's an arrogant attitude, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this government to think that they can go ahead and remove those beds and then come back a year later and say, see you haven't filled your beds. Those 10 beds weren't full all the time. You had 10 for about half the year, you had 6 for about half the year, so your average was 8. We'll pull out another 2. Now we're down to 8 beds.

And you know, Mr. Speaker, the arrogance of this government's unbelievable. Thinking that the people of this province can't figure that out, that in about five, six years they'll have every bed pulled out of those hospitals, and then say, well you had no beds in your hospital and nobody seemed to be sick in there so we can shut the hospital down. Seems a little stupid for logic, Mr. Speaker, yes it does. But that's the logic that the Health Department uses in this particular province and they use it very well.

I said a word or two about crime. I need to say a bit more about that. We look at . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the Health Minister said, some kind of logic. Well, Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you it's the Health Minister's logic. He's the one that goes ahead and pulls out those extra beds. He's the one that makes sure that they have the number of beds down to that particular level. I haven't seen him go to a single hospital and say, well the beds were pulled down to 10 because that was your average. We'll bring it back up so we can keep your average there. He

hasn't done that, Mr. Speaker. He buys into that goofy logic and he buys into it very well.

The crime in Saskatchewan. In this province, Mr. Speaker, we take a lot of pride in the fact that we're neighbourly. We take a lot of pride that we still stop to help someone with a flat tire. We take a lot of pride that if someone's hurt on a farm, we go out there and we help take off his crop. If the neighbour in the city isn't feeling well or going away on holidays, we'll cut their grass for them. That's the kind of province, by and large, we are. And I'm proud of that, Mr. Speaker, because the reputation, that's very important to me and I think to each one of us here.

But then suddenly we had that reputation, and then we find out that we have the other part and I talked about that earlier: about the car thefts, about the murders, about the break-ins. And when those things start happening, Mr. Speaker, people become fearful and they start to worry about helping somebody else they don't know. We need to be very vigilant in this province, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we get those crime rates under control. And if it means being a little tougher on the criminal element, that's fine. That's fine.

I need to say a word or two about our highways — and I've already talked a bit about the lack of commitment to that by this government — but particularly Highway 312 in my constituency. There's a couple of exciting developments that have happened and I mentioned earlier on, Mr. Speaker, about the vibrant agricultural aspect of my constituency. We have at one end of it a Can-Oat plant; only one in Saskatchewan, doing very well, Mr. Speaker, doing very well. People in the area love it because they can go ahead and ship their oats without having to pay a whole lot of freight for it — just take it right to Can-Oat.

Now in my town of Rosthern, there's a debranning plant coming up, Mr. Speaker. So at the opposite ends of Highway 312, you have two major farm processing plants. The grain going to Can-Oat comes from Duck Lake, comes from Rosthern, comes from Wakaw, Laird, Carlton, goes down 312 and heads in that direction. The grain coming to the debranning thing will come in the opposite direction from communities such as Carlton and Laird and Waldheim and Hepburn and Dalmeny.

So Highway 312 will see a major increase in very, very heavy traffic. And that highway has had some serious problems in it. And with those sorts of things happening, it needs some very definite attention to it, especially with the fact that the things that are there are exciting, Mr. Speaker. Because farmers many of them now are being able to grow crops, sell all their crops without paying a dollar of shipping to the railways because they can deal with it all within that area — whether it's the debranning plant, the Can-Oat plant, whether it's the hog operations, the cattle and dairy operations — everything that's grown there can basically be taken care of in that area, but we need some good roads.

One other thing, retail sales. We have become dead last in Canada again in retail sales. And this government needs to look at that and say, how can we perk that up a little bit? And I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, if we could keep in Saskatchewan the sales that go across the border to Alberta, would take us

right out of last place, out of second-, third-, fourth-last place, probably put us well up into the middle and maybe even the top half for retail sales because those sales are going over there. This government needs to address it, and needs to address it very definitely with a very close look at their sales tax.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by reiterating my earlier point that this government has no vision for the future of this province and that's unfortunate. So the Saskatchewan Party did the NDP's homework for them. We have proposed cutting the basic provincial income tax by 20 per cent, reducing the PST (provincial sales tax) from 7 per cent to 5. By doing this it'll save the average Saskatchewan family thousands of dollars which they're going to spend, Mr. Speaker, which they're going to spend. When people have money, they spend it. And the member over there who's hollering with his . . . (inaudible) . . . I'm sure spends every dollar he gets too. We have no doubt about that.

Cutting taxes, Mr. Speaker, will hinder cross-border shopping, and we'll get that business back into our communities of Lloydminster, North Battleford, Swift Current, and that whole area.

Just two years ago, Mr. Speaker, the NDP government committed to spending 250 million a year on the highways in Saskatchewan but they've fallen far short of that. We need to deal with that. Since the members opposite have come into power, the number of people on their welfare rolls — their welfare rolls which are there because of the kind of province and the situation they've created — has significantly increased, Mr. Speaker, from 57,000 to over 72,000. And that number is growing, Mr. Speaker, because there isn't enough of an incentive to get them off of social assistance.

The Saskatchewan Party wants to help these people to better themselves and contribute to society, as we all want to, by a welfare-to-work program that will replace the existing welfare system with a true employment system that both requires and enables fully employable welfare recipients to work.

With respect to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, which did not seem to be that important an issue to the members opposite or to the things they've done for farmers in the last while, the Saskatchewan Party will ensure that Saskatchewan crop insurance is affordable and effective.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has a blueprint for the future of this province. It is clear that our message is getting out to the people in Saskatchewan, and we call upon this NDP government to dissolve this legislature and to call an election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, to request leave to

correct a printing error in Bill No. 6.

Leave granted.

BILL WITHDRAWN

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley that Bill No. 6, The Coroners Act, 1999 be withdrawn and the order for second reading discharged.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

