

EVENING SITTING
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1

The Chair: — I would ask the minister to introduce his officials please.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the officials. On my left, Terry Scott, deputy minister; Hal Cushon, director of policy and program; Doug Mathies, Crop Insurance general manager; Ernie Spencer, policy director . . . or assistant deputy minister rather. And who else have we got — Jack Zepp, director of admin services; and Ross Johnson, budget officer.

Subvote (AG01)

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials. Welcome, Mr. Mathies, from Melville; nice to see you here tonight.

I just want to start off with a question dealing with crop insurance, and specifically with crops that may out of necessity have had to been left over winter and then suffered wildlife damage. Where does the responsibility lie and how does one initiate a claim for such damage?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — The program works so that you have to make a post-harvest claim by November 15. And then upon harvesting, whenever that may be it will be analyzed to see if there's any contamination quality, excreta or whatever. And then . . . and if you're not in crop insurance of course, there's always the big game damage compensation program that you can apply to that has rules and regulations around it with a \$200 deductible.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. So there's no need to be in crop insurance, and I guess I should have remembered that.

But the concern that's come to me is about an individual who did in fact have to leave out 150 acres of crop. And it was damaged by wildlife to the extent that even the grain companies would not consider even buying it if he harvested it. The gentleman tells me that when he went to crop insurance to have it appraised for wildlife, they would not even go out to appraise it. What would the reason be for that?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well we don't want to guess, make too many guesses here. I think the best thing to do is to either give us here the information or send it privately over because if it was recent years, like this year, then we don't see any reason why it wouldn't be adjusted. But there again, like we're just talking here and we're kind of guessing. So we don't have to guess, you might want to give us more detail.

Mr. Osika: — Okay, but the drill is that once it's reported to wildlife and wildlife . . . Environment and Resource Management people ask crop insurance to evaluate it. Crop

insurance — there should be no question that they should go out and assess the damage because it's not a crop insurance problem, it's a provincial resource management problem.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — But crop insurance would do the adjusting. So it would come to us and so we don't know why . . . what the situation is with regards to your case, why someone wouldn't come out and adjust it.

Mr. Osika: — The suggestion was made that . . . an observation was made that there was the majority of the crop in the area had been harvested and since that was the case, they would not go out to assess or evaluate the damage. And that kind of bothers me a little bit because there are extenuating circumstances and individual cases. And I guess what distresses me is just the refusal to even go out and evaluate it and give it to the Environment and Resource Management people and then let them deal with whether or not it should or should not or could not have been harvested the previous fall.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well again we don't know the details and if you want to provide us with the name and the details we can certainly look into it and get a factual response.

The guidelines for crop insurance in this program are that you have to follow good management practices. If the crop is off by the end of September in the area . . . if all the crop is off in a good year, for example, and this crop is out in November then you have to ask . . . crop insurers ask themselves well what about management practice here. What's the circumstances? And if they were to be denied a claim they always have the route of appeal. So they can take their claim to the appeal board.

But again we don't like guessing on the details so I'd appreciate it if you just . . . We always look into these things. I mean like I have a number of examples for the wildlife compensation, because it's a new program over the last few years, and we basically got everything ironed out but we need the detail.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister, and I appreciate that. I appreciate the responses from crop insurance on issues that come to my attention and responses from your department. But in this case it was just a little bit of a concern to me and I know there's an appeal process. But sometimes those things drag on and on, and at this time of year when people are anxious to clean up their land to hopefully be able to start seeding again if they get some kind of help. But I will then give you the detail in writing and appreciate your response to that. Thank you very much.

I'd just like to shift gears now, and wonder if you were able to this evening give us a bit of an update with respect to where we're at with ACS (Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan) loans in as far as the extent of them?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I can start with this. We got ACS staff here that will be here . . . is here as we speak.

The total loan values, I'll give you the last three years if you like. In 1996-97 we had 16,762 loans for a value of 263.6 million. That declined in 1997-98 to 10,800 loans at 175.3 million. As of December 31, 1998 we had 7,875 loans for a

value of 144.5 million.

We can give you a further breakdown if you desire.

Mr. Osika: — Those are impressive differences and reductions. How do we account for those? Are those loans that have been paid back in their entirety? Are those loans that have been paid down? Or are those loans that have been forgiven?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — We were trying to figure out if it was the same year end. I gave you the year end total for 1998-99. What I'll give you here is . . . What's happened of course is we are winding down ACS, as you know, and there's been a combination of people moving their portfolios to other institutions and that. And there's some write-offs and there's some settlements.

So I'll give you some of the numbers. Since April 1, 1996, \$40 million of repayments . . . or settlements rather. As a result of payments, \$206 million has come in.

We've had \$64.8 million of write-offs. These are a combination of uncollectible loans where there was no recovery possible, or settlements were less than full. Then we collected during the same period, \$58.8 million worth of interest.

So it's a combination of settlements, payoffs, and, well basically people moving their accounts.

Mr. Osika: — Sixty-four point eight million dollars in loans that were written off.

For handling all these transactions, does ACS have to rely on outside legal counsel or assistance from law firms? And if they do, who are the law firms and what would those costs entail?

(1815)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — We have . . . The Department of Justice handles a lot of our legal work internally, and then we do have some law firms; I know — MacPherson Leslie Tyerman. We're trying to get you some numbers.

In 19 . . . legal services as of February 28, about \$174,000; and . . . from MacPherson Leslie Tyerman. Anyway there's a number of other ones as well, totalling \$190,000. So most of it's MLT (MacPherson Leslie Tyerman).

The thing that we've done that you may know or may not know, is that we've handled every case on a business-like basis. No longer, I mean as of a number of years ago if you were going to start winding ACS down, no longer are we retaining solicitors to chase something . . . money that's not there.

So what they do is they look at the asset base, make a business decision on behalf of the taxpayers of this province, if it's possible to get a settlement, a reasonable settlement, we always try to do that first. If there's no money there, of course then there are write-offs because you can't get money out of something that's not there. And the cost as of February 28 is about 190,000.

Mr. Osika: — I thank you for that, Mr. Minister. Following

along on another issue that seems to have really come to light in the very recent past and that . . . I want to share this with you because I need to have some of your views and responses on how you see this situation unfolding, and whether or not there can be anything done to help people whose leases have expired — the six-year leases that have now expired as a result of land being recovered by financial institutions.

And now the six years is up and the land is being repossessed and put up for sale. There are different financial institutions and I . . . some of the people that have in fact been faithful in living up to their lease commitments and responsibilities now find themselves faced with a request for a horrendous amount of money as a down payment on an opportunity for the right for first refusal.

Is there anything that might be done to help these folks keep the land that they faithfully retained and faithfully paid their financial responsibilities and commitments? Is there anything that your department can do to offer some assistance to these folks that desperately want to continue farming?

And given the circumstances, the financial and economic conditions that exist, is there anything that your department might be able to do to help in this very urgent situation?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I believe you're referring to the problem with Farm Credit Corporation loans? With our land, the bit that we had, there was about two-thirds of the land went back to the original owners that we've sold. And so as far as FCC (Farm Credit Corporation) is concerned they're asking, I believe, up to 40 per cent down payment which some of the people had a problem with.

What we've done, we've met with FCC; I've met with them myself. We then coordinated a meeting with FCC, the lands branch tenants association — I think that's what they call themselves now — and our department.

They had that meeting about two weeks ago — ten days ago — two weeks ago. And out of that meeting came a decision that they would explore options as to how they might handle the next part and portfolio through FCC.

Unless I'm mistaken, I think FCC seems to be the key right now. And I'm going to be meeting with this tenants association when they've reviewed the options. And I don't know exactly when that meeting's going to be yet.

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Minister, one of those people that have been talking to me are saying, hey look, all we want is some kind of a break to keep our land and continue to farm it. And if in fact FCC in this case wants 40 per cent down, would there be a consideration for the monies that have been paid over the last eight to ten years, some of that be used as a portion of the down payment, that's what they're looking for. I guess they're desperate to try and find some means or some way or some help to retain their land that they want to continue farming.

I'm pleased to hear that you will be meeting with those groups. There are other financial institutions involved as well and I guess what distresses me in one instance is . . . is a farm family that tells me that the land is being repossessed and leased to

others with no consideration for leasing back to that tenant.

And I'm curious and I wonder if you might be able to enlighten me why that is? When they want to continue farming the land is being repossessed and being offered to people in a surrounding area but not back to the person that's living on that land and wants to continue farming it. I'm not sure whether anybody has come to you with that problem. If they haven't, I want to share it with you on behalf of my folks.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well not to confuse the issues. The issue you're talking about is Farm Credit Corporation which is of course the federal government. We are involved to the point where we're trying to offer some assistance and some kind of a settlement in terms of the down payment because the down payment really is the issue. Because, if you compare the lease rate to the payment with the interest rates that are out there now, there's not much difference. It's that down payment that is the problem.

And we are trying to help them. We don't have a vehicle to extend money of course because we winding down FCC . . . or we're winding down ACS. And of course there is the banks, you know, lenders or credit unions. But we must remember that the FCC tells us that 80 per cent of the land that's gone back have gone back to original owners. And I get both sides of it, I must tell you, because there's other people who say well you know you've right at first refusal. And, you know, working towards giving the people who lost land, giving them breaks to get the land back isn't fair to me as somebody who wants to expand my land base for my son. I mean you get both sides of the argument.

What we're trying to do is be very sensitive to those people who have leases and want to keep them because it's part of their land base. And I think they'll be the number one priority if possible to try to find out if there's any possible way. We're encouraging FCC to be as flexible as possible.

And I'm simply in there just to try to see what . . . with the department to see if there's anything we can do to help in terms of options, remembering that we don't have a vehicle to lend money to these people any more.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. And I appreciate that. And it's Farm Credit Corporation we've been talking about. But there are other concerns, similar concerns in the same area with the credit unions here in the province.

And that's what kind of distresses me because these were the institutions that were to assist co-operatively to maintain an economic base in rural areas, the things like land bank. And yet here people come to me and say what is happening? If there was some assistance, some way that we could continue to lease the land.

But to have it offered up to others because people didn't have the down payment . . . I don't know whether you have some contact with that lending institution as well or the banks in the areas to meet with not only Farm Credit but perhaps these other financial institutions like the credit unions and banks might be involved as well to say hey, look folks, we have a real desperate situation in rural Saskatchewan in our agriculture, in the area of

agriculture — the industry that's the economic engine, the driver for this province.

If agriculture shuts down — I don't have to tell you that, Mr. Minister, you've got to know that — if agriculture folds, good grief, then we ask somebody to turn off the lights as we're leaving and it's bad enough now. So I guess in desperation these folks are trying to cling, trying to hold on to the opportunity to continue to maintain our status as a breadbasket of the world and be able to raise their families in small communities in rural Saskatchewan. But now they're faced with yet another hurdle of having to deal with big institutions that don't seem to have the same type of concern for the future of agriculture and the economy in this province.

So I'm hoping that perhaps you might include these other organizations as well in your discussions to perhaps consider other options, extensions of leases. As you mentioned, the lease payments were probably about the same as what the mortgage payments would be. So what's the difference if the money keeps coming in? At least the land is productive, is maintained, and is not just repossessed and left to mother nature.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I don't disagree with what you say in terms of the necessity to keep people on the land. In as far as ACS is concerned, we have almost wound down the leases. We have about 60,000 acres left. We've had very few cancellations and most of them are resolved just through flexibility. The banks and credit unions total — I can't give you . . . I don't want to give you individual amounts but — total 167 accounts, 167 leases with 67,000 acres. So you'll see that as far as ACS is concerned, the banks and credit unions, there are very few comparatively left. The major number is in Farm Credit Corporation.

And all I can say is that we are working and talking with Farm Credit Corporation to try to be flexible. I'd encourage anybody that has a problem with the leases to become a member and join the, the lease, lease, farm . . .

An Hon. Member: — Crown Land Tenants Association.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thanks Ernie.

Crown Land Tenants Association, and that way they will have up-to-date information as to what's available to them. And like I say, we'll be meeting with them and trying to help them out with the FCC to see if there's some flexibilities.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. There is some urgency to that because some of these leases are on the verge of expiring or have expired. And there is just a very brief window period.

I just want to make one . . . mention one other thing with respect to the lease and mortgage payments, that in 1996 for some of these folks that have faithfully paid to maintain their financial responsibilities, there were increases of up to 30 per cent. So it's not as if the people out there aren't trying to meet their financial commitments. They want to keep farming.

That's the point I wanted to make. I appreciate your comments and thank you to you and your staff. I'll defer to my colleague from Thunder Creek.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And good evening to the minister and his officials.

I might as well start out this evening probably where I'd ended off with the minister last time we had spoke during an estimate session, and it was probably with respect to farm input costs and whatever initiatives that your department might be undertaking with respect to at least trying to monitor these farm input costs and taking it a step beyond.

I've referred to it often enough when myself and my colleagues have presented petitions in this House time and time again where we feel, and so do the people of this province, that there is a watchdog role that could be played by governments, both federal and provincial.

What specific initiatives are you planning on undertaking in this fiscal year? When is your next meeting with your provincial counterparts? And will the cost/price squeeze on the farm be at the top of the agenda?

(1830)

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well of course as you know, I've talked about this issue many times on the floor of this legislature and at the federal-provincial table and with my colleagues, and what we decided to do before we started talking much about it is show some leadership in that area.

And you will know that we reduced crop insurance over the last three years — premiums — by 40 per cent. That has been a great asset. We've added new crops as well. The input costs from private sector have been reflecting the price of grain for many years.

We have an agreement with other provinces to share statistics. Having said that, some of the other provinces aren't really . . . it's not on top of their priority list to do that. So we've initiated our own survey; it'll be starting this late spring, summer, to try to do analysis in Saskatchewan of what's happening here.

And what else could I say about that? We know it's a concern. The problem is that if you're going to put any limits on . . . And all we can do in Saskatchewan — shouldn't say "all we can do" — what we're doing in Saskatchewan is two things.

Number one, internal: reduce crop insurance by 40 per cent. We've removed the tax on fuel, totally on diesel and are rebated on gas — in fact it's all rebated, I think it's about \$5 million that we don't rebate — basically removed all the taxes on farm inputs.

So we're doing as much as we can possibly do here in Saskatchewan within our financial constraints to reduce farm input costs. As you will know, that this government puts in about \$310 per capita to agriculture, and that includes fuel rebates and everything we do for agriculture. And the next nearest province is Alberta at \$139 per capita. So we're stretched to the max because we got small population and a large agriculture base here.

If you're going to effectively change the free enterprise system in terms of inputs, then I would ask for your advice on what we

should do. Because I'm not sure that anyone in Ottawa is willing right now to stand up and put price controls on input costs which would lead to . . . you know where do you start and where do you stop? With fertilizer fuel, would you go to combines or tractors . . . so that becomes a bit of a bag of worms.

So maybe you might enlighten us as to what you think we should do, more than what we're already doing at putting in, well \$310 per capita plus the AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program which is another \$70 per capita within the very tight budget constraints. And remembering the fact that Ottawa has, in the last . . . since 1995, reduced transfer payments to agriculture in Saskatchewan by \$550 million annually.

So we're in a bit of a bind there, but I understand the problem. I appreciate you bringing it up.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, nobody on either side is advocating any price controls here. You ask what sort of solutions. Certainly some of things that we think that could be of assistance are things like such as we attempted to introduce in terms of private members' legislation earlier today where we propose the establishment of a monitoring council. Again going back to what we've said time and time again over the past four or five years where we feel that the government's role should be that of a watchdog role.

I know the minister has had copies of correspondence between myself and many farm implement manufacturers, chemical manufacturers, or have expressed concerns on behalf of farmers. Can you outline for me if you now have a program in place where you, as Minister of Agriculture in this provincial government, are actively soliciting the support of these input manufacturers of all sorts to try and at least curb the increases in the costs of their products that they're offering to the farm. Or have you undertaken any of that?

Because I know last year I asked you this very thing and I was told that nothing had been undertaken. And at that time I had recommended, as I am again tonight, that I think there's a role for government to play in that.

I think if the private sector feels that in addition to individual farmers and farm groups looking over their shoulder so to speak, trying to monitor the prices, trying to ensure that these companies are putting their products into the foreign marketplace at what is the best possible price they can and still maintain some profit, but at least allow some farmers some breathing room when they're being squeezed as much as they are right now.

I really think that there is a role for you to play in this regard. I'd like to know how many of those sorts of initiatives have you undertaken since we've last spoke.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well as I said that we have been monitoring the situation and we're going to be doing another input price survey because we believe that's the best way to show to the private sector companies that there's somebody watching them. Because if we monitor the price, they know that we know what the price will be from Shaunavon to Melfort and

any place in-between.

And so that's the route we've chosen. And that's why I asked you, you know . . . maybe I could ask you how successful you've been in terms of lobbying them because this is a free market system. And it's nice to think that we can get on the phone or write a letter to some of these folks and we're going to change their minds.

You won't change their minds until they know they're being watched, and they'll be monitored. And that way the farmers, then we can disperse information to all the farmers. And it's the consumer that's going to make the difference, because they won't be able to charge higher prices in one area than another if the consumer knows where the lower price is.

Now this issue is very difficult because it is a free market system. And so the route we've chosen is to monitor and publish. We are very disappointed that your Liberal cousins in Ottawa have cut out their monitoring system. The StatsCanada surveys for farm inputs has been discontinued, I believe. And that's unfortunate.

So we're trying to again backfill this and I think that we're doing about as much as we can. Now if you can come up with any new ideas, we're certainly willing to entertain them.

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the minister. You've got our assurances that if federally the StatsCanada people have discontinued whatever efforts they were undertaking to monitor farm input costs, that we certainly will raise this as a concern as well.

When you're faced with headlines like we have in *The Western Producer*, most recent issue with respect to the struggle with input costs and studies showing farm expenses rising faster than revenues, it's something that, as difficult as the issue may be, we have to make all attempts that we possibly can to try and rein in some of these costs that are increasing.

Just as one example, I can quote from an individual, a farmer from the Hearne district in my riding, and I quote:

We at age 60 will be done. We cannot operate on 1970 commodity prices with 1999 input costs. We've done everything possible to become more efficient, yet our government gets less efficient and more costly to our industry.

Now I take it he's referring to not just your government, he's referring to federal government as well. Because I think you have to acknowledge that we have done our share in terms of undertakings with respect to your federal counterpart and the federal government at large to do more for farmers out here.

I don't have to remind you that we were there last November when we went down to Ottawa. And at that time, as we do now, we were worried and we presented those worries that both levels of government would continue on with bickering and dickering and no money would end up in the farmers' hands. It's unfortunate but it's probably six or eight months later and that has ended up being the case.

We maintained all along, and we're not sorry for it, that there was a role for the province to play in that whole issue. We maintained all along that we thought the appropriate cost-sharing arrangement was 60/40 between the federal and provincial government. We've not done any flip-flops on this issue. We've been firm all along.

I know when we went to Ottawa, some individuals might . . . some parties may have rode on your coattails and for a short period of time agreed with your position that it was nothing but a federal issue. But we certainly never maintained that. We always felt there was a role for you to play and we still do to this day. And in a moment I'll send a letter across to the minister.

But it's basically a summation of concerns with the AIDA program, concerns that my colleagues and myself receive on a continual basis from farmers across the province. A number of concerns, not only from the farmers but from the slew of accountants now that are charged with the responsibility of trying to complete these forms.

We hear time and time again, right from the outset . . . we can take you back to . . . We had a meeting down in Vanguard last fall. Coming from that meeting there was a very strong opinion that there should be some acreage — cultivated acreage payment should have been the vehicle to try and distribute the income. And out of that meeting too came the suggestion, well maybe it has to be capped.

But certainly there had to have been a better vehicle to try and put money in farmers' hands sooner than later. This letter basically is a summary of some of those concerns. I'll be sending it across to you here shortly. But I would like to know what you and your department have in place in terms of an alternate course of action. How can you get money into farmers' hands sooner than this flawed program is going to do it?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I would like, Mr. Chair, to make a comment on the last issue of input costs just so that it's clear to everyone. We believe that the federal government has played a very significant role in input cost increases.

The \$320 million of Crow benefit that was removed by the Liberal government in Ottawa caused farmers' input costs to go up by 156, I believe, per cent to 98 cents a bushel. The same time when the regulatory review process was discontinued, there has been an estimated loss for Saskatchewan alone of \$110 million because the Liberal government in Ottawa discontinued that regulatory review process that was established under the transportation Act. They reduced, in 1995, the payments under the safety net program across Canada. Saskatchewan's reduction was \$80 million.

So if you take the 320 million, the 110 million and the 80 million annually, that adds up to about \$550 million. Now I appreciate you being concerned about input costs, but I think that I really would appreciate you also — and maybe you have done this — sing loud and clear that if we want . . . because input costs is a free-market system and because the subsidy game is not a free market system in Europe and the US (United States). Canada must maintain its equivalent level, a

proportional level — let's go to proportional level. We don't expect them to be able to pay what the US can pay but proportional level.

Well I understand and I agree with you on the input side, it's really tough for farmers to compete, and that's why we, when the federal government has taken away \$550 million a year, we wouldn't even need the AIDA program. And that's why we have tried to backfill by reducing crop insurance costs, by making sure that there's no tax on fuel except for about \$5 million, by removing the E&H (education and health) tax on horticultural and intensive livestock operations.

So that's why we have tried to backfill and then now we've talked about the AIDA program, and you say, you maintain that you agreed 60/40 right from the beginning. Well I can say that I, with all due respect, I totally disagree. Because what you're saying when you agree with 60/40, you're saying that you agree that Saskatchewan taxpayers, Saskatchewan people, should pay \$70 per capita, through their taxes, and Ontario people should pay \$4 per capita through their tax base. See I don't agree with that, and I don't know why . . . maybe you can explain to me why you do agree with that.

When you say do we have an alternative plan? Well we had a plan; we presented it to the federal government. They rejected it. I mean the negotiations went on, and we eventually, because of pressure . . . like from you, were forced into going into a program that put Saskatchewan taxpayers at a disadvantage, and 40 per cent of the jobs in this country are related to . . . in this province are related to agriculture.

So what we were doing by agreeing to your 60/40 split, was taking those people of 40 per cent plus the others who were not directly involved and saying you have to pay a disproportionate share because you're being punished for living in a province with a small tax base and a large land base. That's why I fought so hard and held out so long on the AIDA program.

One of the reasons we went into the AIDA program was because we wanted to do a NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) top up with money that we already had allocated, federal and provincial money — mostly federal money granted. So we were able to do that.

(1845)

I think that is an option. If you're suggesting, as some are, that we as an option, we pull out of AIDA, I don't think we can do that. In fact basically the agreement is signed, and if we were to though, what it would mean is that — and go to an acreage basis, and I don't disagree with an acreage basis provided it's guaranteed, it's not countervailable, and there's some discussion there — but we could go to a NISA top-up, which I think we could get away with. But if you're saying just take our money out and go an alternative, our money, at \$70 million annually, is \$1.40 an acre. That's not going to help the average person.

So if you wanted to go to your idea of an acreage-based payment, or to another thing like a NISA top-up to get money more equally distributed, then you need a hundred cent dollars. That would mean you need the federal government to agree to

change the program.

I've asked, just for your information — and maybe you know this — when I was in Ottawa two weeks ago at world trade meetings, I asked the federal minister: is there any possibility for change for this year? His direct answer to me was no.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chairman, my colleague has suggested, before I send this letter over to you, that maybe it would be appropriate to read it in the record, and I agree. And then I'll address some more questions to you after. But I'll go on then:

As you are aware, Mr. Minister, recently there have been increasing calls for the Saskatchewan government to pull out of the AIDA program. I've spoken with producers, accountants, and other concerned groups who have expressed concerns that the program does not address the needs of Saskatchewan farmers and the process of application and payment is convoluted and drawn out. Many of the producers who do qualify will have to wait until fall before they receive a payment.

It's been the Liberal caucus position since this crisis began last fall, that funds were needed in farmers' hands immediately. Time, energy, and money has been wasted over the last eight months and farmers in this province are no further ahead. The new crop season is now underway and many producers in Saskatchewan are in no financial position to put seed into the ground, let alone pay for the cost of inputs to see crop maturity.

Farmers, and it appears governments, are also confused with AIDA. I hear daily questions from producers regarding rumoured changes to the program, as well as inquiries made to the AIDA assistance line which have solicited uncertain and vague responses on how to complete the form.

One hundred and forty million of Saskatchewan tax dollars are earmarked for this program. The government has a responsibility to farmers and all people in the province to ensure that Saskatchewan benefits from this program. If this is not happening, I urge you to reconsider how these funds can be spent to provide immediate relief and support for our farmers.

And thus ends the letter, Mr. Minister, I'll send this across to you right now.

But to address some of the issues that you've already covered off because I provided basically a synopsis of that. You mentioned that you didn't think — I don't know if you used irresponsible with respect to us, but certainly you disagreed with what we said was what we thought would be appropriate in terms of a provincial government's commitment.

I can quote you a few interesting things that have been said in this legislature in years gone by. Things like what your Premier, then in opposition, has said with respect to what he thought cost-sharing arrangements should be between a federal and provincial government when it came to providing assistance to farmers faced with disaster situations. And your Premier in March, 1989 — March 22 to be exact — in the legislature to

Grant Devine regarding the federal-provincial program of the time. And he said and I quote:

And if it isn't 50-50, what amount of money are you prepared to offer in order to get this program up and running so that the farmers can get their much needed payments at this point?

I can quote more of these, but the point being we are asking for you as a government to do the same sorts of things that you've asked governments in years gone by and that's to accept that you have a responsibility to the farmers of this province. The monies, the \$70 million you refer to year by year that still isn't being distributed to farmers as we speak. We need to know that you might have some alternate mechanism on behalf of people who are saying now at this point in time they want to know if you've got an alternate mechanism to get that money into their hands. How can you get the province's share of the total aid package commitment into farmer's hands right now?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Chair, I've re-read the letter that was written into the record . . . read into the record and while it does identify some of the problems, it certainly put forward any solution. I'm not sure why you didn't include a solution.

Your last paragraph says, if this is not happening, I urge you to reconsider how these funds can be spent. I urge you to reconsider. My question is: what is your solution?

You know, you can sit there . . . And I understand how it works in opposition. I was there for five years. But you can sit there and you can say, fix it, and forget about the pressure you put on to get in the program. Forget about the pressure you put on to get in 40 per cent.

So while you offer no solution to the program, you can sit there and try to ride both ponies at once. But I'll tell you what happens — the gap gets wider sometimes. And you get into a bit of a problem because you haven't thought further enough, farther enough down the road.

So you can't say last fall and even now we said go into AIDA, but now that you're in, you should do something else. That's not credible.

We went into this program. I'm not going to stand here and go over all the reasons why. You know. You've heard them ad nauseam. So we could get NISA top-up considerations for the next round of safety net agreements — all these things. And now you say farmers aren't going to get money fast enough.

Well the Liberal government in Ottawa has chosen this program. I couldn't influence any change. You couldn't influence any change. You started to, but then you said, well just put your money in. And you know that the federal minister said, no go.

Now my question to you is: are you advocating that we pull our \$70 million this year out of the AIDA program and pay it in some other manner? Is that what you're asking?

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Chairman, the minister seems to have lapses of memory because earlier this evening I referred to

solutions that had been presented to us — and I'm sure as well as to yourself — rafts of letters. A lot of people suggesting per cultivated acre payment would have been more appropriate. Caps if necessary is another common suggestion.

Surely to goodness your department has put some efforts towards determining some alternate vehicle of distributing some money. Don't put the question back to us. Look at the resources around you right now, Mr. Minister.

We as opposition don't have the same resources to apply to this problem that you have at your command. So certainly, certainly I think it's more beholding of you as government to come up with some appropriate solutions and some appropriate alternate possibilities for distributing this income? I'm not talking about you pulling \$70 million out of farmers' hands by any means. You can't try and accuse us of that. What we're saying is put it in their hands now. Do you have a vehicle? Have you made studies to determine an alternate vehicle to put the money in the farmers' hands right now?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — The answer is no, and you know that. The program has 850 people registered as of a few days ago . . . or applications in. You're a little bit late. But the reason I want you to answer the question of do you . . . are you advocating us pulling our \$70 million out, our 40 per cent out, and distributing it in some other manner? I have to know that because there are some people asking us to do that — very few but a few. And I'm saying that if we could do it on acreage basis it would be \$1.40 an acre. That won't help the problem and could put in jeopardy our future negotiations with the federal government on future safety nets.

But I want to know what your position is on it because it's important to me to know that. Because if you're saying take the 70 . . . I'm not saying that you said to take the 70 million out and just forget it. But I want to know if you mean take the 70 million out and reallocate it on an acreage basis; take the 70 million out and reallocate it through a NISA top-up; take the 70 million out, put a whole new administration together I guess as we would have to for an acreage payment and use, you know, a percentage of that money for administration.

But the question I ask and I ask the same of the official opposition is I have to know what your position is because when I'm dealing with this . . . I've taken the position to Ottawa saying is there any possible change? He says no. I'm saying, put full . . . the farmers out there to apply. The best you can for everyone is to apply. You don't have to go to an accountant. Sit down, bite the bullet in five pages. I'm going to do that myself; I'm sure you are. But then we can do the analysis.

And the federal minister has opened the door to possible changes next year. So the door is closed for any options this year. So the answer is no. While we have tried in the past to do other payments, to do it other ways, they said no. They still say no. So I'm past that now because it's too late. What we're doing now is trying to make sure people apply so they can do the analysis for next year's program.

Mr. McPherson: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, I welcome you here with your officials here this evening. My colleague had to just step out for a moment to take a message.

However, I find the debate somewhat interesting for a few reasons.

When I listen to you sit back and say there's nothing we can do, that's the point that my colleague and our caucus has been making for months.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I didn't say that.

Mr. McPherson: — Yes, that's exactly what you said, that there's nothing you can do. There's nothing you've attempted, nothing you are going to try and do. That's clearly what you're saying by your actions and basically your words.

In fact, when we look at this AIDA program, do you accept it's complicated, and do you accept that it's expensive to do, and gives you absolutely no assurance? And I know you accept that. You've said so publicly, right? But yet you're sitting back and saying, that somehow, somehow you really can't adjust or you don't want to become involved in any way of making this program better.

And there's the concern, Mr. Minister. Because we think back to last fall when there was discussions of, if there's a program, who should do the program. And we were consistent all along. We were consistent because the farmers that had been talking to us, day in and day out, were telling us they needed help, they needed it now. And I have, I would think, hundreds of letters here that I'm going to share some of those with you in a moment.

But when we look at how that played out last fall with you refusing to become involved. In fact you were quoted in the paper as saying there wasn't a farm crisis. It was all but over. In fact it's all but over. In some areas of the province there might be pockets. I remember you saying in the northwest there might be a little pocket, as though somehow the people in the southwest wouldn't deserve again as they did in what was it, '92-93 — '92 — when there was, you know, some serious problems in some areas of the southwest. And I had yourself down to tour that area and you saw with your own eyes the devastation in some areas and chose to do nothing.

And so what my colleague, and what our caucus has been saying, is the mistake that you made was last fall, by saying we're not going to be involved. We're going to let the feds design and deliver a program. And I think back to if that was the view that was held when the first GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program came about, what would it have looked like in this province. Because the fact that there was a different GRIP program in each of the provinces, tells me that the provinces each sort of took the bull by the horns and said listen, we've got to design to best meet the needs of our particular situation in our province. We're putting our money up, but here's the design.

You see, and this is where you failed miserably because you take these, you know, the Tories with you and in fact you hid behind them for awhile with their position that oh no, there shouldn't be any provincial involvement although it's an agriculture-based province; we really depend on agriculture.

Now I find it interesting that the provinces where fisheries is

important, the fisheries minister gets very involved; but here in an agriculture province our agriculture minister doesn't get involved, the Premier doesn't get involved. And we know what the Tories' agenda was. There's no money at all because they came out with a platform much too soon as we all admit, and they readily admit, and they forgot to put agriculture in there so they didn't want any money coming from the province because they wanted, I don't know, to run a tax agenda or whatever the Tories want to do nowadays.

(1900)

Then all of a sudden they thought, well you know we're not up to speed here so we'll say 70 and 30, 30 per cent province. We solidly . . . we're saying, no it's a 60/40, it's a traditional split. It's a traditional split that in fact has the province having major design of the program.

Then of course they run around and say well maybe 30/70 wasn't right, maybe it's 60/40 and then all of a sudden we listen to the member from Saltcoats in there haranguing and harassing you in question period says, oh it's not nearly enough, it's not nearly enough. And we sit back and have quite a chuckle as I'm sure everyone else in this province does at Tories.

But that doesn't take it off of your shoulders, Mr. Minister, because the fact is you sat back and did nothing, and now you're saying well it's because of what the Liberals did, they forced us into spending this money and oh, the program isn't working.

But you see, Mr. Minister, if you would have been proactive from day one and gotten involved and said, yes we accept that as an agriculture province. We have a role to play here, there's a financial role and we're going to get into this early and we're going to be proactive and we're going to design this program so it meets the needs of Saskatchewan farmers. That is what you should have done.

Now I know the Tory caucus accused you of taking trips to Mexico and out marlin fishing and everything else when this here was being developed. I don't believe you were. You were maybe on one of your cabinet junkets all right because you guys are gone all the time, but the fact of the matter is you should have been here to ensure that there was some design that worked for farmers, Mr. Minister.

And I just want to touch on some letters in front of me. I've got a case of them here and there's hundreds of letters that have been returned to a questionnaire that . . . that we sent out some months ago. I'll read you a couple of the questions and tell you what the responses are so you can be in touch with what farmers are saying perhaps should be done, not just in this program but in branch lines, elevator closures, and the like.

The first question is: do you believe the Saskatchewan and federal governments should quit their bickering and immediately provide joint financial help for cash-strapped farmers?

You know, almost every return — hundreds of them — this is in my constituency alone, Wood River, said yes. Because at the time that's all that they were watching is the federal and the

provincial governments arguing back and forth who should do what, you know. And, you know, and really the people are sitting back and accepting my first point is that why weren't you involved from the word go?

Second question: do you think governments should be doing more to address issues like unfair world trade subsidies and rising input costs? As my colleague has been raising with you not just today or this week or this session, he's raised it on several occasions and in this term. Since 1995, I've heard him raise it in this House several times. Solidly, yes, you should be doing more.

Another question on the form. If other provincial governments are willing to help fund long-term national income disaster program for farmers, should Saskatchewan government pay as well? Solidly yes; out of these hundreds almost every one of them are saying, yes, you should be involved.

Should the government pass legislation calling for the immediate moratorium on grain . . . on elevator closures. Yes, they should pass legislation.

And how many times have you guys stood up to say, oh that's a federal responsibility. We can't do anything about it. Well I say, shame on you, and so do these hundreds of people say shame on you for saying you can't do anything about it as rural Saskatchewan is being bulldozed over. Of course, of course, you can do something about it.

And you know our view, and the reason why it's a major platform plank with us, is that yes, we will bring forward legislation when we're government to say there's going to be a process put in place to not allow the bulldozing of rural Saskatchewan, rural Saskatchewan grain elevators, without a fight.

SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) supports us. SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) supports us. Every community and RM(rural municipality) in Saskatchewan supports us.

So don't stand there and say we're not right by saying let's quit this, this bulldozing of elevators until there's some thought gone into this; that there is a process, some time delay; give the communities a chance to purchase these things to see if we can't, firstly, keep them as elevators. You know, perhaps as seed cleaning plants. Speciality crop-holding facilities. Feed plants. I mean, the list goes on and on.

Is there, is there perhaps an arrangement that could be made with the grain companies and the communities and RMs to keep it viable? Keep pressure on those that can make a decision on branch lines to keep the branch lines there. You know, there isn't anyone in this province that doesn't sit back and think the railroads and the grain companies are playing a horrible game with the nod of your head, Mr. Minister. They accept that things were worked out in the back rooms and, boy, would they ever like to know what involvement your government had in this too. You're sitting back and doing nothing.

And you know, at the end of the day if we're wrong, if the people all throughout Saskatchewan are wrong and the law is

wrong, I would ask you, Mr. Agriculture Minister, and the Premier, and whatever grain company — you know, the Wheat Pool who are already sending letters out publicly threatening that they're going to campaign against us — I say have at it, go to town. If you people think that we're wrong and you're not prepared to stand up for rural Saskatchewan, then take us to court.

But I'll tell you the law is going to come in here, it's coming on when we form government. And if you think it's right, if you think it's right, Mr. Minister, to challenge the law, do it. Do it if you think that's where it's at for the Saskatchewan people.

Should provincial and federal governments play a bigger role in stopping branch line abandonments? Yes. Hundreds are saying yes, you should. You shouldn't just stand up and say in this House, well we can't do anything on health care because of, I don't know, some federal argument. Can't do anything on post-secondary education, you know, because we have students that can't afford education in this province, well, federal . . . Every answer that you give in this House, and it doesn't matter the topic, whether it's highways — highways is a provincial responsibility — but you people say, we can't do anything because it's a federal responsibility. You can't do anything with branch lines because it's a federal responsibility.

And the people are starting to sit back and say, well you know, if you really don't have power, if you don't have control and you don't have will, why don't you get out of there and perhaps hire half a dozen good accountants to run government because that's really what you're all about?

I'm going to quote from some of these letters just so you know what the people of Wood River and throughout Saskatchewan are saying. This one is from a fellow, Brian Carleton at Bracken.

The payment should be on total acres. With the loss of the railroad we lose communities. With the loss of elevators we put pressure on highways. Let's put pressure on grain companies and railroads to save our highways.

That's what the people of Bracken . . . and I'll tell you, I don't think there's a community throughout Wood River and beyond that didn't have several, several responses.

There's another fellow from Woodrow in regards to this . . .

An Hon. Member: — Allen Engel.

Mr. McPherson: — Well no, Allen Engel wouldn't be responding to this because I think when he's not trying to be a candidate for your party he lives in Texas. However, this guy goes on to say:

No money to operate on and I would have to walk away from the farm. And with no job I don't know what to do or where to begin looking.

You know, I've read every one of these letters. I encourage you, Mr. Minister, perhaps you'll be busy with an election soon but if you . . . when you're in opposition or when you're not, you're completely out of power, take the time to look through these

and then you'll appreciate what the people are saying.

You know, it's not a good thing what's happening here. Here's another one. Ken Heatcoat, Assiniboia:

Make the payment on cultivated acres and not on income or seeded acres.

Several of these, you know, they've used several pages to fill out their remarks. I don't hear anyone say, sit back, sit back and do nothing and complain about a program, but here's our money and just as though you're throwing it into the wind.

That's irresponsible and for you now to say that you don't . . . you're hands are tied, that's irresponsible.

Harold Hiltz of McCord:

I won't be able to pay my taxes and fuel bills. Also, our elevator closed on the first of December, 1998. When you ask the company about these things, they just give you the run-around. They say the only way that you can buy the elevator is if you move it. Yet we are working on a short line rail line. The company doesn't want you to use the elevator for grain handling; they just want you to push them over and burn them.

You know how many hundreds of times I've heard that comment?

In fact, here's several letters that were sent in from the Willow Bunch area.

I am writing to express my concern regarding the number of grain elevators being closed and torn down in rural Saskatchewan. Agriculture is the mainstay of our economy in rural Saskatchewan. When elevators close it not only affects farmers in the area, it also has a severe negative impact on local businesses, schools, churches, rural municipalities and towns.

Businesses close; people move away; schools and churches close; communities die. We cannot allow this to continue.

As elected representatives in the government, I strongly urge you to take whatever measures are necessary to address this issue. If nothing is done rural communities will disappear.

And this is a stack of letters that were sent in and I hate to guess how many we have from the Willow Bunch area alone. Here, Mr. Pete Ducharme, Boisvert, Bonneau. I'll tell you, just in this package alone there must be about two dozen letters from the Willow Bunch area because they're sitting there watching you allow their community to be bulldozed over.

Here is one — Jerry Chisholm from Lafleche. And . . .

An Hon. Member: — I know Jerry too.

Mr. McPherson: — You know Jerry. Good. Because Jerry asked me to read some parts of his letter. He's got about three or four pages, but I'm just going to take a few of the parts that

Jerry talked of.

My farm suffered because of drought conditions last spring. I had a poor crop of hay and low yields of grain. Crop insurance was of little help because I could not afford the premiums and the coverage was low. By January 31, '99 I will have the following payments . . .

I'm not going to list them but you can read them later, of his concerns and of those that he finds very difficult to make. I'll go on:

Problems that I am having is not all related to low grain prices for farm commodities. I lease farm land from the provincial government. My lease rent has increased 50 per cent. When the federal government paid out the Crow freight rate subsidy, the provincial government received the hundred per cent of the subsidy on the land they own. I was promised a share of this subsidy, and to this date I have received no payment.

Well you're saying it's not true. You're going to have this letter. I'll leave Jerry's letter on the top because I encourage you and your department to answer. He's got several concerns in here, and that's one I would like you to answer personally . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well that's great.

I'll go on:

Because of this, my farm input costs have drastically increased in higher lease rent and having to pay very high freight and elevator handling charges.

Rural communities are declining at an alarming rate because of the farm crisis — large farm operators, fewer farmers, elevator closures, rail line abandonments. All governments across Canada have to act now because talking about helping will be too late.

And he ends by saying:

From time to time I need help from my neighbours and they need help from me. This is called co-operation. Why can't governments, provincial and federal, do the same and come up with immediate assistance because, if not, there won't be any farm neighbours left to help each other.

And in this letter in particular, Mr. Minister, I'm going to ask one of the pages to take it over just so you know it's one that I need a response to, because it talks about other things — other than the elevator closures and branch line and the farm program. But there's some things about your provincial lease rates that he deserves an answer to.

This one I'll send over now but you'll get the whole case of them after a little while.

Here's another letter, from Shaunavon:

By closure of elevator and rail lines as there most likely will be fewer . . . no farmers which will kill the smaller communities and towns. It seems our government does not believe agriculture is important to our province any more.

Here's one — Roger Morgan from Kincaid. I think Roger's the mayor out there.

I expect elevator closures which will impact the immediate village by losing over 25 per cent of our tax base. As it is, we have an extremely small tax base. This will decimate our community.

(1915)

Here's another one. Thibault from Ponteix. And I found some of these comments quite interesting and I think need to be said in here to you, on record, Mr. Minister, of what people feel.

We were shafted with increases on our power, gas, and natural gas, taxes, and on and on, with this famous NDP government which are robbing us blind with increased costs that are not needed.

Another quote:

I have a son that wants to farm, trying to take over my farm. How can he? This government does not believe in farmers. Since our NDP government has been in power, they have done nothing for the farmers but increased costs.

Another quote in his letter:

It is very sad to see a government that does not care any more about farmers, any more than this. Again if the contracts of GRIP would not have been breached by this NDP government and finally discontinued completely, today our farmers would not be in a crisis situation. We as farmers could budget for the future, as we knew year after year what our bottom line would be.

And another quote:

This crisis money should be paid per acre and not according to your income.

And that is the message that's been coming loud and clear for hundreds, hundreds of these letters. Here's another one from Willow Bunch, and there . . . here's a quote on this one:

It could have and should be an acreage payment. If they don't want the large farm corporations to get everything, then put a ceiling of something like a thousand cultivated acres onto it.

And to finish, and I think this sums it up for these hundreds of letters in this case that I have:

No railroads, no elevators, no roads, no school. No point in staying.

And, Mr. Premier . . . or, Mr. Minister . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh yes.

That will . . . I think that says it all, Mr. Minister. I think it says it all about what your inaction has done. You've done nothing but chirp away in regards to rail lines. But what have you accomplished? You've accomplished nothing. Why? Because

you weren't sincere and you weren't really trying. You haven't really tried . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . About elevator closures? Well you're not prepared to break . . . you're not prepared to make a law that isn't just or whatever you're saying. You're more than prepared though to break GRIP contracts, or I can go on and on about the amount of laws that your government has broken since 1991. But yet when people ask: are you prepared to put a law in place that will perhaps help save rural Saskatchewan? No, no you're not prepared to do that, are you?

So with that, Mr. Minister, I guess you don't even need to respond. I think those letters say everything that need to be said. You don't need to respond to me. You need to respond to those hundreds of people that you have those letters of. Because that's the view, that's what people are thinking and saying out there. You can say you're hands are tied, or you're too much like these Tories that you just don't know what you should be doing. But the people out there are saying no you have a role to play and you should be playing that.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well I know that the member won't want me to respond but I'm going to respond just a little bit — just a little bit. Now he says we're into it because we have some time restraints, but I'm just going to take a couple of minutes. I promise him I won't go beyond the allotted time. And I know he doesn't want me to respond because he would like the record to show that his facts are true, but I'm sorry much of what he said is simply not true. In fact I get the letters and I understand, I understand the problem.

But I want to point out a few things. One of the things . . . the first thing I'll point out is the headline in these letters says: let's keep the wheels turning on our farmers. Well I'll tell you that's exactly what the federal Liberals have done, they've driven over the farmers and I'll tell you why. If it hadn't been — and at the risk of sounding like I'm bragging and I do not want it to sound that way — but at the last federal-provincial meeting in July of 1998 in Ontario had I not sat at the table supported by Manitoba and said we're not leaving until we get a farm aid program on the discussion table, because there wasn't any until then, we wouldn't have had one, we would not have had one. Because I said I'm not leaving until the federal minister says it's a discussion point on the agenda. And that is what happened and I'm glad I did that because at least we got something now.

But we talked about cost-sharing, we talked about program design, your federal cousins wouldn't listen. You talk about something that I'm going to have to correct because I've just listened to it too long from the opposition parties. And after you say well I declared the crisis over. I mean anybody with half a brain and one arm could figure out that that's not true . . . (inaudible) . . . yes that's right, half a brain and one arm could figure out that's not true. Because there was one particularly bad reporting incident, and I know the opposition likes to jump on that but you didn't bother to check out if it was true or not. You keep repeating it. The reason is because there's an old saying that they say you know — in fact I remember my grandfather first telling me this, he says — a lie will be around the world twice before the truth has it shoes on. And that's what you're depending on as far that is concerned. So you know you can say those things.

But here's the point I want to make. You said time and time again just put in 40 per cent — just put in your 40 per cent. Now you say it's not working. What's your alternative? I mean just think about this. Just putting your 40 per cent until the program's in place and it's all operational, and now you say it's not working, you should do something else. That's not credible. That's not credible.

And you know what you talk about the federal fisheries. Well the federal government, your federal Liberal government, put a 100 per cent of the dollars into federal fisheries in the first go-round — 100 per cent of the dollars. And you want Saskatchewan to put 40 per cent in. No I don't quite understand the credibility there.

And you know the thing I want to talk . . . end on is this. You still haven't told me what your opinion is or your policy is. I mean, if you had a good policy, and I'm sure that you're going to say you will have one, you would have somebody running against me in my constituency when you know there's a pending election now or October or whatever it might be — you don't have anybody because you don't have any concrete policy. You can send the letters out and you can have them sent in. That's a good exit. That's a good exercise . . .

An Hon. Member: — You wish.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well he says, you wish. Now they're going to try . . . maybe not run a Liberal, try to get a two-way race. That's the nice thing to do, yes. But if you've got no policy you can't expect people to run for you in rural areas.

The last two points I'll make just to make this very brief is that your Liberal government in Ottawa — you talk about farm input, you talk about helping farmers — they've cut \$550 million out annually since 1995. They cut 320 on the Crow benefit. They cut 110 on the deregulation of the railroads. They cut 80 million out of cutting back of the safety net program. Mr. Chair, the federal government has gone from 1991-92, \$2.3 billion of transfers to Saskatchewan to half a million — 2.3 billion to half a million. That's about a 78 per cent or so reduction. I don't know the numbers exactly. But you can't stand there with no policy, have your federal cousins running over, turning the wheels on our farmers as you said in your thing, and pretend that you're going to have some influence in rural Saskatchewan.

You know I appreciate bringing up the input cost factor. I appreciate you putting letters out to the farmers because all information is welcome, but you can't get away with saying that you know the answers when you don't have a policy. And your federal cousins sat there and you sat there while they did it, cut 550 million annually and have reduced . . . the federal government has reduced spending to Saskatchewan from 2.3 billion to half a million. That's incredible. So I just wanted to answer some of those points just to make sure for the record that there was some counterbalance to what you said.

Mr. McPherson: — Well, Mr. Minister, just a couple of comments back, you talked about being in Ontario, and in fact you were one of the ministers or the minister that was hammering away and there had to be a program. And it begs the question, Mr. Minister, what did you do immediately after

saying that? There's got to be a program and I can't wait to get out of the room and not be part of its design to make sure that Saskatchewan farmers are going to be dealt with fairly.

It makes no sense what you're saying. You're trying to take credit for this program, but you're coming back here and saying the program's no good. What does that say about you? Doesn't say very much, does it? The fact of the matter is you're saying, well we don't have a program or a platform.

Well it's been very clear. We're prepared to stand up with every community and every RM in Saskatchewan to stop the crazy elevator bulldozing that your government supports, and on that one point alone you're saying, no, no, no. We can't do that. We don't want to step on the toes of maybe your friends in the Wheat Pool. No, it's the railroads, and when you're at a railroad meeting, no it's the elevators.

You know it just shows how little, maybe little input you have. Right? In your own government. What is it? Just stand up for farmers in some way. And how many times have you stood up to say well, you know, it's the Crow rate, you know, the subsidy was paid out all wrong. And then you've fallen back saying that was such a huge mistake and then you come back here as Agriculture minister and promote hog barns and saying yes, we have to have all these feed operations in our own province and thanks to changes to the Crow benefit, we're able to do feeding things here. Depending on the crowd you're talking to, you have a different message.

And I think that gets you into trouble. If I can give you any suggestion to help you out as a minister, is to try and be a little more consistent. Be a little more consistent. Consistency means a lot to the people, and it really shows in spades with our own caucus.

For four or five years we have been very focused on what the issues of the people of this province are. It's health care. It's making sure our young people are properly educated here in Saskatchewan and they have opportunities here in Saskatchewan, and that there is a rural Saskatchewan for them to be in. And that there's roads in rural Saskatchewan which your government sits back and laughs at because we're prepared to put every cent of fuel tax into our roads and highways and streets and infrastructure. And you think that's a joke.

What is that you're doing — what is it that you're doing? You're saying, well, you know, what else is in your platform? I encourage you . . . at least the Tories come out with a platform. Maybe it's one by last November they wish wasn't out there because it was so outdated — it was so outdated, so out of touch, and the feds had already accomplished over half the things by the first two months it was out, of things in their platform.

But you, sir, you don't even have a platform. And you're standing up and saying, well shame on you, what's in your platform? I say shame on you, you're in government, what's in your platform? When are you going to come clean with this, you know?

So . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . yes, just stand up and just

look the camera right in the eye and say, you know, we believe in trying to save one elevator. Start with one and you'll find it gets easier as you go. Can you save one elevator? Just name the town, okay, because there was what, 235 elevators announced affecting 170 communities that the Pool announced? Can you stand up, Mr. Minister, and just say I'm going to go to bat and start to try and just save one. And we'll help you, you know, then the next and the next. Can you take that step?

An Hon. Member: — You make the symbolic gesture.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Well, Mr. Chair, there really wasn't much of a question there. And I'm going to thank the officials that have been here with me tonight.

But before I do that, I just want to say that on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan over the last three years as the Minister of Agriculture, I think that we've done . . . I've got to know a lot of people around this province on top of the other 10 years that I was around here. And I've a very good repertoire with the industries and I think the agricultural industry has got a great future in Saskatchewan. There's some rocky roads, but all in all it's got a great future.

And I really want to thank my department staff for the work they do on behalf of the farmers of this province because that's so important. And we'll continue to do that. As you witnessed tonight, the information is readily available through the department staff. And I thank them. And I thank the members for their questions.

Mr. McPherson: — Mr. Minister, we too would like to thank, you know, you for coming here and answering whatever questions you can. It really wasn't so much the questions as us trying to encourage you to do things where we see that you're really falling short.

Are we saying that you or your department is a wholesale failure? Not at all. You've done some very good things, Mr. Minister. And I congratulate you for that. Whether it ends up being good at the end of the day, or not good . . . You know, you've really promoted the hog industry in this province. Hopefully that will work out for you and all of us.

(1930)

You, in my view, have really been behind the elk industry. I talk to many of these people. On their behalf, I want to congratulate you. I think there's a few areas that you could maybe get a little bit better there, but by and large I think you deserve some credit, and I give you that credit when I'm talking to these people.

But what I am saying, Mr. Minister, is there's a few areas. Read the letters; you'll see what they are — elevators, branch lines, new programs. You know, just try and do a little more there.

With that, I want to thank your officials for coming here tonight and you, sir.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Subvote (AG01) agreed to.

Subvotes (AG02), (AG05), (AG03), (AG06), (AG07), (AG08), (AG04), (AG12), (AG09), (AG10) agreed to.

Vote 1 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Lending and Investing Activities
Agriculture and Food
Vote 146**

Subvotes (AG02), (AG03), (AG07) agreed to.

Vote 146 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
General Revenue Fund
Budgetary Expense
Agriculture and Food
Vote 1**

Subvotes (AG13), (AG12) agreed to.

Vote 1 agreed to.

**Supplementary Estimates 1998-99
Lending and Investing Activities
Agriculture and Food
Vote 146**

Subvote (AG07) agreed to.

Vote 146 agreed to.

**General Revenue Fund
Executive Council
Vote 10**

The Chair: — I would ask the Premier to introduce his officials please.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I have seated to my left the deputy minister to the Executive Council, Dr. Gregory Marchildon; to my right is the chief of staff, Ms. Judy Samuelson. Behind Dr. Marchildon is Bonita Heidt, who is director of administration — I hope I have the title right. And behind me is the executive assistant to the deputy minister, Jim Nicol.

Subvote (EX01)

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Premier, welcome, and to your officials. We hope to have an exchange of some questions and ideas, and of course, some answers, Mr. Premier, as we move along through this evening's session.

Mr. Premier, the Saskatchewan Party caucus looks forward to spending the next few hours discussing the issues facing the province, especially since you haven't seen or heard much during question period throughout this session.

Mr. Chairman, for starters, I just want to make some brief opening comments before our entire caucus begins to question

the Premier in more detail regarding his government's policies.

Mr. Premier, this session has been a bit short in many ways. It's been a bit short of new ideas from your government, a bit short of your vision for the future, and a bit short of accountability by either yourself or your government for your own record.

We have not seen a Premier or a government interested in talking about their record. And we can certainly understand why. We have not seen a governing party laying out their plans for the future. Instead we have watched as the NDP (New Democratic Party) desperately tries to re-fight elections long since settled.

As we head towards the new century, we see a government clearly looking backwards. The NDP is stuck in the past and it has no plans for the present and no vision for the future. And that's why it's time for a change, Mr. Premier.

We've watched recently as the NDP has hit the panic button resorting to personal attacks and an American-style, negative, ad campaign. Because, Mr. Chair, that's what old, tired out governments do. When they want to avoid talking about their own record; when they have nothing to put on the table as far as new ideas, that's when the personal mudslinging begins. It's a sad and pathetic sign of a government in trouble.

And, Mr. Speaker, as the personal attacks on the Saskatchewan Party have continued and the outright falsehoods about our platform perpetuated, you know what's happened. Our membership has more than doubled in the last 10 . . . in the last year to 10,000 members; 10,000 members after less than two years in existence.

That speaks to our leader, Mr. Elwin Hermanson, and that speaks to our platform . . . the platform of our party. And you know, Mr. Chair, that also speaks to the frustration of the people, the frustration that the people have with you, Mr. Premier, and your government.

Mr. Chair, throughout this session the Saskatchewan Party has been referring to eight areas where Saskatchewan is at the bottom or near the bottom of the pack in all of Canada. We have presented these over and over again, hoping that the members opposite would put forward a plan to address these issues — put forward some ideas how to move Saskatchewan up that ladder. But we've seen none of that.

Let's look at taxes, job creation, health care, crime, welfare, population growth, retail sales, and highways. Saskatchewan's at or near the bottom of the pile in all of these. And of course there are other areas where this government is failing the people of Saskatchewan — education and agriculture just to name two.

In all of these areas, Saskatchewan trails the pack. And we hear nothing from the government except the same excuses we've heard since 1995. Their only solution is to find someone else to blame. Eight years after they came to power, they still take no responsibility for what is happening in Saskatchewan today.

I think we saw a typical example of this recently when the government signed its memorandum of understanding with the nurses. There was the Premier smiling for the photographers,

thumbs up.

But when negotiations hit yet another rough patch, where was the Premier then? Not to be seen. Now the government had no responsibility in these negotiations. It's become all too typical of the leadership or rather the lack of leadership we've come to expect from the government and this Premier.

Mr. Chair, the number one issue facing this province is the high tax policy of the members opposite. In this year's budget the NDP failed to put forward any plans for long-term sustainable and affordable tax relief. Yes, they talk about their desire for tax relief, but that's all it is — talk.

Admittedly that's an improvement over what we hear from the labour party . . . no, I mean the Liberal Party which seems to think the sky's the limit when it comes to taxes.

Our tax rate in Saskatchewan, the second highest in the country, has killed economic development and job creation in this province. We are last in job creation — absolutely last. Since November, 1991 the number of jobs in Saskatchewan has grown by some 23,000. In that same period, Alberta has created 300,000 new jobs — 13 jobs in Alberta to 1 job in Saskatchewan.

(1945)

Over the last year, the number of jobs in Saskatchewan has been dropping. We're the only province to go backwards and the government takes no responsibility. The NDP still doesn't get it. Government intervention doesn't work, especially an NDP government's intervention. The millions of dollars lost in the NDP's foray into the potato farming is only the latest example.

We maintain that the only way to job creation in this province is lowering the tax burden on people and businesses. We've seen the government's tax take go up by \$1 billion since 1991 — \$1 billion. Utility rates have increased 19 times since the NDP came to power — 19 such increases for SaskPower, SaskEnergy, SaskTel. That's a horrendous amount of increases in this period of time.

And yet the government maintains this has no effect on our economy. Well respectfully we disagree with you, Mr. Premier, and so do the people of Saskatchewan.

And what have we gotten for these high taxes? Better health care? No. Better highways? No. Better education? No. All we've seen is the economy of this province grind to a halt. All we've seen is our youth continuing to move out to search for opportunities. All we've seen is our seniors leaving the province they helped build in search of a reasonable standard of living.

Mr. Premier, we'll be raising many, many issues with you tonight, and I'm hoping you are prepared to discuss your own record — something you have not been willing to do for eight years. I hope we hear your vision for the future — something else we have not heard.

With that, Mr. Premier, and before my colleagues begin to

question you on specific areas of government for which you are responsible, I ask that you do just that.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, the specific request of the member opposite is that we take accountability and accept our record. And I tell the member here as I've told the journalists and the public elsewhere — in fact even this afternoon as we were doing what may or may not be the end of session, wrap-up interviews — we take the responsibility of our record very seriously. Because from a government point of view in any election campaign — for that matter at any time — there are two issues which are involved.

You have to defend what you have done. And you have to put forward a vision of what you are doing. And if you don't believe that, let me just assure you that we have every intention of defending our record.

I'm not going to take much time in the examples that I want to say about defending our record other than to point to perhaps two areas. One that you raised was taxes. We're proud of our record on tax reduction. We balanced the budget in 1995. And every year since 1995 we cut taxes.

In 1995 and '96 income tax was cut — that's our record. In 1997 provincial sales tax was cut from 9 to 7, and the items that are taxable were reduced — that's our record. In 1998 we cut income tax again — that's our record. This year we reduced the sales tax from 7 to 6 per cent — that's our record. In total since the budget was balanced in 1995, we've cut sales tax by 33 per cent overall, and we've cut income tax by 10 per cent overall for the average family — that's our record.

Now what's the vision? The vision is more of the same. Our vision is to have a balanced approach to government. We believe that now that we're in surplus — at least not in deficit — that for every surplus dollar we have what I call roughly the one-third, one-third, one-third guideline.

One-third, roughly speaking, for tax reduction. These aren't watertight compartments. One-third, roughly speaking, for new investments like health care — 11 per cent bump up this year. And one-third, roughly speaking, for tax reduction — the 1 per cent on the PST (provincial sales tax). And as our economy grows and as we get healthier, we're going to be able to inject more money on that balanced approach — that's our record.

Our economic record is equally very appealing. We have increased employment in 1998 by about 4,422 . . . 42 people. We have made 30,000 new jobs since 1991. There was a slight . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . the member says oh . . . a slight drop back from the last three months or six months of 1998, but we're back up in that regards. We have announced recently something which you have not pursued, a job creation strategy in the forestry which would amount to 10,000 new jobs, with an investment of \$850 million, \$850 million, most of which is private money or partnered money in some form or another.

Our population has been growing since 1991. We're now at a million people and about 25,000. And our future vision is more of the same — diversification, value-added. We want to be able to make sure that we get the natural resources that we have the bounty of, and make sure we value-add and diversify. Research

and development — I could mention the synchrotron as an example of that. That is a Canadian first. No other province has it. Canada is the only G-7 country that doesn't have a synchrotron. We have a synchrotron now.

The Ag-biotechnology, Innovation Place. We are one of five centres of excellence in the world. We have it. We're going to be building better, new varieties of crops, more disease-resistant, more frost-resistant. We're going to be providing more opportunities for farmers at the farm gate. We're doing the same thing in farm implement manufacturing. We're doing the same thing in connection with food processing. Mitchell's Gourmet Foods — we're not doing it, they're expanding in an alliance with Schneiders.

I can tell you with the Alliance Pipeline. The Alliance Pipeline is spending 750 to \$800 million in Saskatchewan alone. It's the largest expenditure of any from the natural gas route through Alberta, BC (British Columbia); BC . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no, Saskatchewan, right here, because it comes right to IPSCO. IPSCO prepares the pipeline. You don't like the facts but that's the case, and not only that, does it go . . .

An Hon. Member: — Alberta money.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — A person says it's Alberta money. It may be Alberta money. It's being spent in Saskatchewan creating Saskatchewan jobs.

We want money from everywhere, whether it comes from Alberta, whether it comes from the United States, any good investment. You may not — we do. That Alliance Pipeline is something which goes right into the Chicago basin in the United States, so much so that the Canadian embassy people want, not only at the request of Alliance and the Canadian embassy, for this government to be present in Washington, DC, when this operation gets formally launched — actually it's formally launched now — but up and running. And I could go on and on.

Now if you ask me have we reached heaven on earth? The answer is no, we have not. Is there more work to do? The answer is yes. But when you compare that record to whatever record your party is advocating, I will not mention for the moment what the predecessor party did, but let's just take what your party itself is advocating.

I can simply sum up my remarks by this very simple answer. One point eight billion dollars you will add to the debt after four years, according to *The Way Up* — that's the name of your document; it's really the way down — for 1,900 new jobs, 1,900 new jobs. Mr. Chairman, four years, 1,900 jobs compared to 30,000 jobs prepared here. We'll defend our record and we'll defend our vision and I have every confidence that the people of Saskatchewan will make the right choice.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. Well, Mr. Premier, estimates so far has been somewhat interesting and somewhat worthwhile. We've talked to other members of cabinet about issues that involved their particular departments. It was sometimes interesting and the odd time it was worthwhile.

For you, Mr. Premier, we have questions that are unique to your

position and they'll be fairly simple and fairly upfront, and hopefully the answers that are forthcoming are a little more accurate than your interpretation of *The Way Up*, sir, because as you know, WEFA is a group that you yourself have used and your government has used and they're the ones that go ahead and justify that program. And that basically goes to say that the same people that you use do not know anything, and I don't think you're prepared to say that.

Mr. Premier, as you yourself have said that before too long we're going to have an election. And a lot of people, including a lot of people in your own party I'm sure, are starting to speculate about your future. So let's start off by a couple of questions on that issue.

Will you definitely be leading your party into the next election? And if so, do you intend to serve out your full term as opposition leader after the election?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'm trying to exhibit control to what I'm sure is a humorous question by the hon. member. And as one of my colleagues says, you've got to laugh. But it's pretty hard to laugh because I think the hon. member is absolutely dead serious in his question. Get up and tell me that I'm wrong in that regard, I say to the member from Rosthern.

You know, this is an example of how the question is so off base. Can the hon. member get up and tell me what his situation will be with respect to health three months from now, three years from now, or four years from now? Can you tell me that? Can you tell me what your position is going to be?

I can tell you what my intended position is. My intended position is to continue what I've been doing for 32 years in the province of Saskatchewan. I have been providing the best in terms of public policy, which you may not agree with, but I see. I've been contributing at a provincial and, immodestly speaking, somewhat at a national level for 32 years to try and improve the quality of life. Tomorrow I'm in Saskatoon with the federal government announcing a national agenda for program of kids on poverty dealing with the inner-core city needs and other concerns, and there'll be another announcement as well.

I've devoted my life to this, and I continue to do so so long as God is willing and my wife permits.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, first of all you didn't listen to the question because it very specifically talked about your intentions. So you didn't have to go off and pontificate about something else on that particular issue.

However, you said that there's going to be something happening and some announcements you're going to make and your concern for certain segments of your society. Probably, Mr. Premier, if you lived in your constituency, you might know what those situations are a little better than you do where you're at right now.

Speaking of your constituency and what you intend to do, I

recall that I think there was a time in the past where your constituency decided that you weren't going to serve again. It could happen one more time, so I don't think it's for you to chuckle. Because both your wife and the good Lord may have a part to play in that.

Mr. Premier, one rumour floating around, and it's been all over the province and I'm sure you've heard it — if not, you're going to get it right now — is that you're interested in the position of Governor General.

That appointment, Mr. Premier, that appointment will be made this fall. Mr. Premier, are you interested in that position?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, again I'm going to resist . . .

An Hon. Member: — You'd have my vote.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I think that's the kiss of death, to the hon. member of Kindersley.

I want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I don't think I'm here to answer rumours, of which there are thousands and hundreds about everybody in this Chamber and otherwise. I'm here to defend the estimates of the Department of the Executive Council.

But I want to tell you right now without any equivocation since you're on this, and I'll just make my caveat about retaining my right on the rules with respect to the Assembly on Executive Council. I'll just make this one answer and make it once only.

I am neither seeking the job of Governor General, nor want it, nor if offered it would accept it, and if somehow by parliamentary decree was designed it, I'd resign.

My service is, so long as it . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Thank you very much. So long as the good people of Riversdale say as your right and other factors that anybody is involved in political life permit, my job is here for the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Premier, that was a very astute answer because it covered my next question and that was, if it was offered to you would you take it? And I think we also heard that round of applause when you made the statement that you would resign.

Mr. Premier, something dealing most definitely with the position that you hold, because you were saying these questions were a little off to one side. The next ones are not.

I'd like to ask you a couple of questions, Mr. Premier, about Tommy Douglas House and how it functions under the provisions of The Non-Profit Corporations Act, 1995 and The Elections Act, 1996.

Tommy Douglas House operated for over 20 years as a non-profit membership corporation. However, Tommy Douglas House accepted donations from the public, donations that

eventually flowed through to the NDP. The Non-profit Corporation Act, 1995 states that a corporation that solicits donations is actually supposed to be a charitable corporation, not a membership corporation.

(2000)

Earlier today, Mr. Premier, earlier today the director of corporations branch revived Tommy Douglas House and deemed it to be a charitable corporation. Under The Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995 charities are required to disclose a lot more financial information than membership corporations.

Mr. Premier, now that Tommy Douglas House has been deemed a charity, will you disclose all of its financial records, donors, and how the donations . . .

The Chair: — Order, order. The Chair has been listening to this and I don't see a tie-in that I was hoping the hon. member from Rosthern, if he had a question for Executive Council. This has nothing to do with Executive Council and the running of government. And why the Premier is here is to answer questions about Executive Council. This is an outside organization, outside of Executive Council, outside of government, and therefore I rule the question out of order.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Premier, under The Elections Act, 1996 as you're being responsible for the taxpayers, for tax allowances that are made, as people give to charities, that is your responsibility.

Under that heading, Mr. Premier, will you disclose all of the financial records, donors, and donations and how they were used from Tommy Douglas House?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I say with the greatest of respect, I do not run Tommy Douglas House. The New Democratic Party or some emanations thereof do. And I'm a little bit surprised about your statement about the reviving of it as a charitable organization because I think there have been previous attempts by some people to revive it, and I think you know who those people might be.

But I'm not here to answer questions about the New Democratic Party any more than I expect the members opposite in this forum to answer questions about the Saskatchewan Party or about a PC (Progressive Conservative) metro fund of \$2.1 million.

Those questions are answered in other forums. I'm here to answer the questions of how the Department of the Executive Council operates and to speak to general government policy department by department. That's the tradition here. And I'm not going to answer any questions with respect to Tommy Douglas.

Mr. Heppner: — With a request to your answer, sir. How did you know that there were attempts to revive it if you have nothing to do with it?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — I have nothing to do with it? I know that you — well I won't say you — but people on your side had been endeavouring to revive it for the point of view of trying to

get exactly the questions that you're asking in this House before this House or in some other forum. That's in common knowledge all over the place, the legal circles and everywhere else.

Mr. Heppner: — It's interesting for someone that apparently doesn't know anything about it how you know so much information on it. It looks like you've been checking very carefully, sir, to see what is going on there.

Mr. Premier, Tommy Douglas House articles of dissolution state that all of its records are to be held by the Democratic Party for a period of six years. You, sir, are the Leader of the New Democratic Party. That means you control the records of Tommy Douglas House and you are responsible for them on . . .

The Chair: — Order. Order. The Chair has ruled on this line of questioning already. There's a different venue for pursuing this line of questioning. It is not in this Assembly. The Chair has made a ruling that the Premier's here to answer questions pertaining to the running of government, Executive Council or any other department of government.

And I warn again there's another venue for that and it is not in this Assembly . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I guess you can ask the questions, I'll just keep ruling them out of order.

But we're not getting anywhere here. So I would ask the hon. member to get into Executive Council and government questions.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Premier, are you responsible for this province and for the laws of this province?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, this is a ridiculous question. I am responsible as you are for the passage of the laws in this Legislative Assembly. Their enforcement and applicability lie elsewhere to the extent that they lie within the purview of the Assembly. As for example in the case of the member from Maple Creek, then we can take some action. That is the law. That is the position. That's the procedure and you know that.

And if you don't know that, then give your head a shake as to why you're sitting as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly).

Mr. Heppner: — Well, sir, we'll take that down another road. Are you responsible for the Attorney General, and are you responsible for the administration of the laws of this land?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — The answer is no, I am not. I am responsible for the appointment of the Attorney General. The Attorney General and the Attorney General's department is responsible for the administration of the laws of this land under the constitution, both federally and provincially.

Now as Premier I can move the Attorney General, I have moved the Attorney General, I can make changes in administrative departments. Those are powers of the Premiers, but it is within the context of the RCMP Police, the Regina City Police, the prosecutors, and the Justice department; but the responsibility for the administration of the laws lies under the

responsibility of the Attorney General.

The Minister of Economic Development is sworn to office and is responsible for the functionings of the Department of Economic Development. Why else do you have estimates where you call Economic Development and have the minister answer questions for X number of hours, or you just finished the Department of Agriculture, because they're responsible, they have oaths of office.

I sit as an equal around the cabinet table with the one exception of exceptional powers, with the one exceptional powers, of the power of appointment.

Mr. Heppner: — You, sir, as you said: you have the power to appoint, you have the power to hire, you have the power to fire individuals within that jurisdiction that you just discussed. And in that you are responsible for how the laws of this province are carried out. And in that it is your responsibility to answer the questions on what is happening with those funds in the New Democratic Party because you are responsible for those, sir.

So I ask you again. Are you prepared to release those records on Tommy Douglas House, either yourself or through some of your officials?

The Chair: — Order, order. That is the same question that was put before and ruled out of order. I will remind the hon. member from Rosthern there is a different venue for following this line of questioning and it is not in this Assembly and I will not allow it.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Premier, this is the Premier's estimates and that is a situation where you are expected to answer the questions that are brought by the opposition to you on various issues within this province.

Now possibly you choose not to want to answer the questions that are being asked. And I have no doubt that you don't want to answer them because you have a very good idea, sir, where those are going to lead. Because as you said in your beginning, and your first answers, you indicated very definitely you knew about all the search that was being done at the Tommy Douglas House. So you kept your finger and your ear on that issue very closely, sir. So for you to sit there and ask me you don't want to answer or can't answer, both of those are incorrect. You can't answer those because you do know what the answers are.

Mr. Premier, Tommy Douglas House is a charity. The ruling has been made by the corporations branch. People have a right to know how their charities collect their money. It's been a major issue throughout this whole land — not just Saskatchewan — throughout all of Canada how charities collect their money, how they spend their money, and how well the money is taken care of.

People have a right to know how their charities are collected and who collects them, and how the charities spend their money, and how they release that information. Because that's been a major issue, as I already said, throughout this country and all other charities. Tommy Douglas House is a charity. Will you, sir, release that information?

The Chair: — Once again I will have to rule that question out of order. The hon. member has been warned several times and if he continues down this line of questioning then I will recognize another member.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay, Mr. Premier, we'll switch gears somewhat. The New Democratic Party itself was incorporated as a charitable corporation under The Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995. You, sir, are listed as a director of that corporation. The New Democratic Party is also a registered political party under The Elections Act, 1996 and so now we're discussing very definitely the jurisdictions of what we're to discuss here today — The Elections Act, 1996. And you, of course, are also leader of that party.

Mr. Premier, could you explain the relationship between the New Democratic Party, the corporation and the New Democratic Party, the political party because you're involved in both. Specifically are these two separate entities or are they one and the same?

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — This is in the same line of questioning based on your ruling and I will ask you: you tell us what the relationship is between the Sask Party and those who control the PC metro \$2.1 million fund. You know all about it, and who are they, how much money is in there, how much money has gone to the Sask Party — tell me about it.

Mr. Heppner: — I have no idea how much is in there. And, sir, I can tell you one other thing, sir — and I would hope you would be as honest, sir, and I hope you would be as forthright, sir — we have not received one cent from that fund and we will not. And you can sit there and laugh and chuckle, throw up your arms as you did last year when you had questions asked . . .

The Chair: — Order, order, order. I will go back to my ruling that there's a different . . . and I will rule the Premier's question out of order even though it was put in the wrong context.

And therefore I ask all members that this line of questioning is not going to continue and we'll go to another member if this line is going to continue. I've ruled on it four times now and I think that that's enough. This line of questioning is not permitted in this Assembly.

The Premier's here, as I've said before, to answer questions about the government and Executive Council, his department, his staff, the running of government. And I would ask the hon. member to stay within those guidelines.

Mr. Heppner: — Okay, thank you. And I'm sure this time we're going to be perfectly within whatever the guidelines happen to be.

Dealing with the expenses and the way the money is spent that come out of the taxpayers' funds to deal with constituency office expenditures — those fit exactly under the Premier's jurisdiction.

Mr. Premier, from 1986 to 1991 you shared a constituency office with John Brockelbank. You and Mr. Brockelbank used your secretarial allowances to pay a number of different constituency secretaries. You usually had two secretaries on

staff at any given time. Now beginning in 1987, you also began authorizing monthly payments of \$410 each from your secretarial allowance to something called office management services. Those payments continued through until at least March of 1991. The description of these services is simply listed as miscellaneous contractual services.

Mr. Premier, we have been unable to find any record of a business called office management services. No record in the corporation branch. No listing in the Saskatoon phone book at that time. No record of office management services ever obtaining a business licence from the city of Saskatoon.

Mr. Premier, who is office management services?

The Chair: — Order. The question being put, I'm going to have to rule it out of order also. Because I don't think the Premier is here as a private member, and I think we're into questioning along the accounts of a private member of the Assembly.

The Premier's here to answer questions on Executive Council, the operation of government. You're asking questions of a private member and the operation of an allowance of a private member, and that's why I'm going to rule it out of order.

Mr. Heppner: — The question is very specifically related to how taxpayers' dollars are spent in this particular province, and to that extent the question is: why is there no public record of the company entitled office management services?

The Chair: — Well I will rule it out of order again, because I believe — we have a difference here — but I believe that you are on to a private member's private allowances and we're here tonight for Executive Council, the operation of Executive Council and government policy. And that's where the question will go.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, Mr. Premier, I'd like to go to a different avenue then. And you talked in your opening remarks, Mr. Premier, about your great record from the last eight years. Well, Mr. Premier, I was a farmer before I was elected an MLA, and there's a lot of farmers in Saskatchewan that are not too happy with your record.

Mr. Premier, let's go through a little of your record with agriculture. You wouldn't answer the other questions. Let's see if you can answer these. Part of your record was GRIP in 1991. There's an election coming so I think that it's really important that we go back over your record.

You cancelled GRIP with contracts with farmers in this province that cost every farmer in this province probably an average of 40 to \$50,000. Mr. Premier, those farmers are not forgetting that and it's election time.

(2015)

Mr. Premier, then you went on to cut funding for agriculture after 1991 till the present day from \$1.1 billion to \$240 million, and you're talking about what a wonderful record you had. Farmers are not happy with you, Mr. Premier.

Then you went on in your downloading, and the only way you knew how to balance books was to raise taxes and download on everybody in this province. Municipalities were downloaded on, and guess what? That caused farmers' taxes to increase. Up went the farmers' taxes.

Education funding cuts, Mr. Premier, same thing. Your way of doing it, you cut funding for education. In fact, this year's a prime example. You had the budget. You bragged about the \$13 million you're putting in for Education, the problem being it was about half of what trustees and school divisions need to break even this year, Mr. Premier.

Guess what that does to the farming community in Saskatchewan. It raises taxes. It puts more load on the farmers of this province. So again, Mr. Premier, the farmers are not very happy with you.

Then comes along this AIDA program, Mr. Premier. Because farmers are hurting badly, didn't just start this year, Mr. Premier — because of the things I've already said, the hurt has been going on them since 1991. Now with the prices of commodities going down, we need help in the farming sector.

And, Mr. Premier, what did you do? You sent a boy to do a man's job. And you sent him out with no allowance. And I'm not belittling the Agriculture minister, Mr. Premier, but because you give him no money to go down East and come to an agreement with Ottawa for an aid package for Saskatchewan, he was useless down there because he couldn't get them seriously to the table. There was nothing he could do. His hands were tied.

Mr. Premier, I'd like to read a little quote out of the paper just for you. And it's a quote by Mark Wyatt, I think it's November 6, '98, Mr. Premier. And I quote:

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

It was a standard (which) Romanow developed during the early 1990s, while serving in opposition to former Conservative Premier Grant Devine.

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

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

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

Well, Mr. Premier, you can decide where you fit in that category. The farmers of Saskatchewan, come this election, are going to give you your answer.

Mr. Premier, one payout in the '80s was \$850 million. You add

inflation to that this time, we here in the province needed one and a half billion. Not for all of this country, we needed that here in Saskatchewan and we certainly didn't need it with an AIDA program. We should have had it in an acreage payment so everybody would have got it.

And we're stuck with an AIDA program, Mr. Premier, because your Agriculture minister couldn't convince them going with no money to bring up a decent program.

And, Mr. Premier, where were you through all this? You didn't go to your buddy, Jean, and say Jean, we need help here in Saskatchewan. You disappeared, Mr. Premier. Instead of doing what you say in the quotes when you were in opposition, you were in your little bubble and disappeared.

Mr. Premier, why would you not get involved and help the farmers of Saskatchewan through these hard times?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to answer this question and speak to this very important issue.

I want to begin by saying that the provincial government in Saskatchewan resisted signing on to the AIDA program and we still hold serious reservations about the AIDA program, much along the lines of the reason that the hon. member from Saltcoats and farming members of have told us. We hold serious reservations based on a number of concerns.

The one obvious example is that it's based on the three-year average of '97, '96, and '95. Seventy per cent, if you're droughted out, 70 per cent of the three-year average is still zero, and it does not meet the needs of the farmers of Saskatchewan.

At the end of the day, our choice was very, very simple. We either sign in — if the member's interested in the answer — we either sign in on a program which gives the farmers \$1 full on the AIDA program, flawed as it is. Or in the alternative, we do not submit our 40 cents and the farmers get 60 cents on the AIDA plan. We decided to go the full \$1 on the plan. That was our approach.

We also said at the time that we're going to hold the federal government responsible for the plan to work, and we are going to do so. And we also said that we're going pursue the other farm issues — short lines; the rail-line abandonment; support for the Canadian Wheat Board; the monitoring of input costs; making sure that there's a level playing field in United States/European subsidies wars; and that Canada should step up to the plate in doing so.

I think that's a sensible position. And I think if you had stood with us in the House, putting forward that position, we could have made a great deal of progress.

What happened? I'm quoting now from the November 13, 1998 *Leader-Post*. Quote:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson agreed with Cline that Ottawa, not Saskatchewan, should be providing cash to help farmers.

I don't know if the hon. member from Saltcoats is listening or pays any attention, but that's exactly what he said. Then what does he say later on, on December 8, 1998, your leader:

Saskatchewan Party Leader Elwin Hermanson is in Ottawa this week (remember when he was in Ottawa this week) trying to persuade federal MPs to support his party's plan for a \$1 billion farm bailout that would be split 70-30 by Ottawa and the Saskatchewan government.

One billion. Big deal. The plan is 1.5 billion and your leader was in there pushing for one billion. We got 1.5 and your people are saying, don't worry about giving them money; they've got the money, undermining it all the way down the operation.

Not only that. If you take a look at your agriculture policies, you take a look at your agricultural policies, if you take a look at your agricultural policies, your leader, when he was a Member of Parliament, he said at that point . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . a member of the Reform Party as somebody wanted to know. His line was that it was time that we get into the 21st century and that farmers should not be dependent upon "bailouts".

That's exactly . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, this is not new. This is exactly the line of Preston Manning and this was the exact line of Elwin Hermanson. No bailouts. Let's get into a business-oriented farming.

Here's a resolution:

Saskatchewan Party will encourage and pursue private sector value-added opportunities for the ag sector at every opportunity.

That is going to be your approach.

An Hon. Member: — You bet.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You bet. Not a penny for farmers but value-added. Value-added is a good idea — we're all for that. But not . . . (inaudible) . . . My point in answering the question, and I'll sit down because I've been a little bit too long in answering it, is that what the member speaks and what the party opposite does are two different things.

The party speaks as if it's in support of farmers, but in reality it acts in contempt of the farmers. It supports decapping the 1999 freight rates, it supports the abandonment of the Crow rate, it supports the question of other abandonments. We heard nothing on infrastructure from the federal government. All of this amounts to \$650 million.

And the hon. member says call an election. There will be an election. And I'm inviting the people . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, soon enough. And I'm inviting the people of Saskatchewan to say there are alternatives.

A lot of people in Saskatchewan are saying there are no alternatives. I'm not buying that. There are alternatives, and we're going to ask the people to take a look at your alternatives and your plan, and we're going to invite that of the Liberal

Party and invite them to take a look at our record.

And I am satisfied, as I said to the Leader of the Opposition, the people of Saskatchewan will do the correct thing and support the government that with their help brought them out of deficit, took us away from the brink of bankruptcy, brought us right to the point where we now have a stronger economy, a growing population, tax reduction, job creation and help for farmers in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Premier, last weekend there was a trade show in Melfort and an elderly gentleman came up to our booth and wanted to talk. And he is a retired farmer, a recent widower, and he moved to Melfort to retire. And the first thing he said to me when he came up to the booth was, Rod, when is something going to happen to get our province competitive in taxes.

And what he said to me was that if we don't do something soon, people like himself who are retired and trying to make ends meet now on a fixed income are going to have an increasingly difficult time. And his final statement to me, I thought was very telling, Mr. Premier, because he said this — he said if it doesn't improve soon, I will be leaving this province and moving to Alberta where my children already are at.

And that unfortunately is the story I hear and I'm sure you hear, if you're listening, far too often. We simply must do something about the high level of taxes that people in this province are facing.

Mr. Premier, the recent chamber of commerce convention in Moose Jaw in *The Leader-Post* article talking about it said the three biggest issues facing this province are taxes, taxes, taxes. Mary Ann McFadyen, the executive director of the chamber said it's the single biggest issue in this province. They said it's a missed opportunity. There was no meaningful tax relief in the budget.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, WEFA Canada . . . and you are very familiar I am sure with WEFA Canada. Your Deputy Premier, when they came to our convention to talk about our platform, when asked about WEFA Canada, he said that WEFA Canada was as legitimate as it could be. They are an international forecasting agency that your own Finance department has used and is using.

WEFA Canada said this, and I quote:

Personal disposable income per capita in Saskatchewan is in danger of following below that of the Atlantic provinces. Tax reductions can be a direct and powerful tool permitting the households of Saskatchewan to escape this dubious distinction.

They went on to say that:

Income tax reductions increase the incentive to join the labour force, to work longer, and to work more effectively. Such increased productivity is the only route to a sustained increase in our standard of living. Sales tax reductions

increase the incentive to purchase. By increasing aggregate demand they increase economic growth and job creation.

Mr. Premier, all people around this province are saying similar things. I'm sure you're familiar with our newly nominated candidate, Mr. John Brennan, the former dean of the College of Commerce. And he said, Mr. Premier, that he was tired of teaching young men and women in this province, only to see them leave in order to pursue their careers and to build the province or the state where they set residency in.

Mr. Speaker, those cries are coming from retired people in my constituency. They're coming from a former dean of the College of Commerce. They're coming from agencies like the chamber of commerce, they're coming from the taxpayers association, they're coming from the Canadian Federation of Small Business. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Premier, they're coming everywhere.

When will you accept the fact that your government has balanced the budget on the backs of taxpayers, and unless we start moving that down much more aggressively with a long-term plan, that this province is in big trouble? That we have to move forward, Mr. Premier? We have to do so today. We need a long-term plan of meaningful tax relief.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2030)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I think that this question raised by the hon. member is a very important question, and it's an important question for a whole number of reasons. Not only in terms of practical economic business reasons, but also in terms of philosophic reasons. And I'll say a word about both of those if I may very briefly.

First of all I want to begin by telling the hon. member what I've been telling people in the province of Saskatchewan now. We believe that we have to continue to lower our taxes in the province of Saskatchewan. We strongly believe that taxes as a component of industrial activity is a very important consideration.

But I want to say to the hon. member opposite that it isn't the only consideration of economic development. In the province of Newfoundland, they have instituted a 10-year freeze on any new taxes with respect to any new corporation that should care to locate in Newfoundland. This is a depressed part of the country. I wish them the very best in economic development.

We will see, however, whether or not the taxes-only proposition — and here's my philosophical point coming up to you — will work in British Columbia . . . in Newfoundland.

Because I believe that economic development is conditioned upon a number of factors, taxes being one. A good, well-educated and motivated workforce being another. Thirdly a good infrastructure system, whether it's schools or hospitals or roads. I think quality of life in terms of the kind of province we have and the kinds of things we can do. A variety of factors. A question of whether or not we have the resources from which we can value-add.

I do not believe that this is a, to use a gruesome example, one-shot-only solution. If it was a one-shot solution only, then people like in Newfoundland would have it. And you are, in your party, advocating the one-shot solution — taxes, taxes, taxes, taxes. And you are, with the greatest of respect, oblivious to what we have done.

And I'll repeat this very briefly. E&H lowered from 9 to 6 per cent; the personal income tax reductions . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, we have the second lowest income tax in all of Canada.

An Hon. Member: — No, you don't.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Yes, we do. Who's lower than us?

An Hon. Member: — Manitoba.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — No. Manitoba's areas of tax are larger than ours. That's right. And they didn't lower their income tax, their PST either. The income tax they lowered by 1 point, 1 point, at 48.5 is their base. We're at 48 this year. Well that's the way they're talking. You don't believe me; take a look at the . . . I mean it doesn't matter with these people, Mr. Chairman, because the facts basically don't count.

I'm reading from the *Toronto Globe and Mail* — *Toronto Globe and Mail* — not Roy Romanow. Provincial rates on income tax as a percentage of basic federal tax: Newfoundland, 69 per cent; Nova Scotia, 57.5; Prince Edward Island, 58.5; New Brunswick, 60; Quebec administers its own system; Ontario is lower at 40. Ontario is . . . Let me just make . . . Just let . . . Member from Kindersley, listen.

Ontario . . . Could I just make a point here. Ontario at 40.5 is lower than us; Manitoba, 48.5; Saskatchewan, 48; we're lower than Manitoba; Alberta is lower than us at 44; and BC is at 49.5.

In other words, we are the third lowest on income tax. We are the second lowest on the PST tax. Those are the *Globe and Mail* figures, not Department of Finance, although they're very accurate. Those are the figures that *The Globe and Mail* got from the federal sources which are there.

Now let me just say the philosophic point before I take my chair. I'll make two other points, comparisons. I want to give this to the member from Melfort who's in business.

When you talk about getting business and attracting business, you have to have comparators. Income tax, tax credits, health premiums, retail sales, gasoline tax, mortgage costs, property taxes, and so forth, electricity. The Department of Finance has these numbers. Every department of every provincial government has these numbers and we compare.

Now for a family of four at \$75,000 total income, here's what it is. Calgary, at the end of the day, their tax level is 17,676. And in Saskatoon the tax level is 17,053 — we're lower. In Toronto, it's 22,105. Which brings me to my last point, and that is Toronto.

Whatever happens in the Ontario election happens for the

Ontario people to decide. Here's what the business groups . . . The member from Melfort, if he would care to hear me out on this, may be well advised to listen to this. And if I may say with the greatest of respect, the chamber of commerce may be well advised to listen to this too.

Ontario chamber pans provincial budget . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well John Brennan of course is so fixed in his ways now for the last 40 years, he's fossilized on this issue. He's fossilized on this issue.

But I will cite what the chamber of commerce in Ontario says. It says the following:

Business groups and financial market analysts, the apparent allies of the Mike Harris government left the budget presentation clearly disappointed, quote: "We do like tax cuts. We certainly do." But listen, Mr. Member from Melfort: "But we like balanced budgets better." Doug Robson, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and the Scotia Bank's chief economist, Warren Jestin, had the same complaint:

But the reality is right now today 20 cents out of every tax dollar you're spending to Queen's Park is going on debt service in Queen's Park, and I think that that is too high. It is one of the highest among the provinces.

The hon. member is not listening to my answer, but I repeat to you this is exactly what the business community is saying. And there's the difference. You have an imbalanced approach which does not work. It didn't work in the '80s and it doesn't work now. Your approach is tax reduction, tax reduction, tax reduction, tax reduction, and at the end of the day \$1.8 billion added to the debt. And you'll have the same responses even by the John Brennan's of the world as the chamber of commerce of Ontario has toward the Mike Harris budget.

What we need in this province is a balanced approach where we tackle that debt as best as we can, where we continue the infrastructure as best as we can, where we lower taxes — I'm in agreement with you — as best as we can, and where we come out equal, namely not add to the deficit. Ontario added to the deficit. The debt is \$120 billion in Ontario. Are you advocating that we follow that line? It seems like you are. And I tell you, you can advocate it, you can advocate it, but I'll tell you what I think the people of Saskatchewan will say. The people of Saskatchewan will say the following — been there, seen that, done that, no thank you we don't want to have anything to do with it again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, indeed the balanced approach is the responsible approach. And that balanced approach means that when you exercise power you also have to accept responsibility for your actions, and for eight years you have refused to accept the responsibilities for the things you have done to this province.

You talk a lot about accessibility in health care, about the five principles of the Canada Health Act. Well accessibility is one of those and we have the worst accessibility in Canada — 28

weeks, Mr. Premier, to get surgery; 21 days to get cancer treatments. Unheard of across the rest of North America, Mr. Premier, and that's your responsibility and that's your record.

We just went through a nurses' strike because of your intervention because you didn't know what was going on there. You've got the past-president of SUN (Saskatchewan Union of Nurses) in your cabinet and yet you don't know what's going on in health care. You don't know that there's a nursing shortage. You don't know what the working conditions are for nurses. Mr. Premier, that's your responsibility. You want the power but you don't want to accept the responsibility.

You know you talked about the Synchrotron. We already have one here in this province, Mr. Premier, and that's Tommy Douglas, because he's spinning so fast in his grave from the way you're destroying health care.

Mr. Premier, you have inflicted on the people of Saskatchewan, the health care in Saskatchewan, destruction, pain, and anguish. Destruction, pain and anguish to the families that have had to wait to get into your facilities; that have had to wait for the surgeries; that can't get into the emergency wards; that can't get their critical cancer care; can't get MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging); can't get CT (computerized tomography) scans; and can't simply get access to a hospital bed.

Mr. Premier, the people of Saskatchewan are fed up with the chaos that you have inflicted on the health care system, and the people of Saskatchewan while they are angry, they also have the solution.

Mr. Premier, the people of Saskatchewan are waiting to provide their own solution to the sickness in the health care system. And that cure, Mr. Premier, will be delivered by the people of Saskatchewan by removing you from office. To remove that virus that is contaminating health care and creating chaos, and that is you and your NDP government. Mr. Premier, call the election.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, again this is a very important issue because health is important to everybody in Saskatchewan. I think it's the most important thing. Now the hon. member has been very critical of me. That's fair enough. I hope he doesn't take offence or get a little too brittlely if I come back with a bit of a response about what your position is on health care.

I have here on February 19, 1994 from the House of Commons, it is not yet as widely known in the province of Saskatchewan as it will be known very shortly, the following statement in *Hansard* of the Commons Debates by Mr. Hermanson, when he was a member of the Reform Party:

I know that most Canadians place a high priority on health care. I would just like to relate a little about what is happening in my own province of Saskatchewan. We have governments that liked to build monuments, that liked to build hospitals. We probably have more hospitals per capita in our province than in any other part of Canada. Unfortunately we now have no money to operate those hospitals. Our priorities were probably wrong, (Mr. Hermanson said then). In fact I'm sure they were wrong.

Now did you read . . . did you hear what I read? This will be around the province of Saskatchewan very shortly . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . You go ahead. Then Mr. Hermanson gets elected in a dead of night, 125 massive leadership race, and they sit down and they develop a constitution platform — now just hang on — a constitution and a platform.

And here I have from the Regina *Leader-Post* of November 17, 1997, fast-forward three years later. And you think anything has changed with Mr. Hermanson? No. Quote:

A plan to invite private health providers to the province to reduce waiting lists was one of the policies that passed without any opposition at your convention.

Maybe you voted for it.

During a panel discussion Saturday, party organizer Brian Fitzpatrick called the five fundamental principles behind medicare "mindless slogans" that stand in the way of innovative health care solutions like private clinics.

Mindless slogans, the Canada Health Act, that is your party resolution. Now chronologically, Mr. Chairman, you know what I'm getting at. You have Mr. Hermanson talking about the fact that he did not believe in these hospitals. Now they have moved to saying that the Canada Health Act is mindless slogans.

And now fast forward to today. Mr. Hermanson goes to the new party, United Alternative, proposal. You know this is the attempt with the Reformers, where Mr. Hermanson in some ways, psychologically and personally, still his heart lies, I have no doubt about it. And I respect his opinions in that regard and I think he's a very honourable and decent gentleman, but he's a Reformer at heart, Reformer/Tory at heart. What he is not is a Liberal.

He goes to the United Alternative and he says, he says the following on February 23, 1999: "I think that the people in Saskatchewan can watch with some interest and positive expectation of better things to come." Referring to the United Alternative. But get this on health care. Hermanson also likes one of the new party's first proposals — first proposals — to have the federal government . . . federal government, surrender its responsibility for health care to the provinces. That too has not been widely publicized but will be.

Now I'm going to put these three together and if it comes down to the question of doing away with the Canada Health Act, Mr. Chairman, and ladies and gentlemen of this Legislative Assembly, and to the people of Saskatchewan, the Canada Health Act being abolished, and this, if it ever should be, a Saskatchewan Party premier at this desk, leading the federal-provincial charge, the federal-provincial discussions to do away with the Canada Health Act, tell me which member in this House would stand up today and say, we would get \$2.5 million from the federal government as we did in this budget for health care if they don't have the Canada Health Act and their involvement in provincial health care.

More importantly, if you do away with the Canada Health Act, the question that the member from Cannington predicated,

namely accessibility, all the problems and waiting lists goes right out the window because the Canada Health Act has those five essential principles as the fundamental law of Canada for all provinces unless you are a Sask-a-Tory. That is exactly their position. That is their position. They are going to do it.

(2045)

And there's something else about this . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no. Now the Leader of the Opposition is waving at me their program called *The Way Up* — the way, way, way out and up. And in the platform they say something different. But I have the quotations and they will be distributed.

Then he comes back and he says this, October 30, 1998 . . . He says something else and perhaps if the hon. member from Cannington gets up to answer a follow-up question or ask a follow-up question he might comment on this. Hermanson says, quote:

If in fact the Saskatchewan Party pledges to audit the health care system (you betcha), in fact an audit is done and we need to pump more money into health care. It gives us more ammunition to go to Ottawa with it.

Oh boy, we have heard the audits before, Texas-style audits. These might be Arkansas-style audits. They're going to be in Saskatchewan. Tory-Party- style audits, that's what they're going to be.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, when they compare positions, the people of Saskatchewan, don't ever forget that the people of Saskatchewan have a comparison. This year's budget — 11 per cent more for health care; \$195 million cash more for health care; more for cancer treatment; more for elective surgeries; more for mobile CAT scanners; more for renal dialysis in rural Saskatchewan; more for mobile CAT scanners in rural Saskatchewan; taking a look at the integrated renal program, diabetes program, mental health program, health services program for the North. And I could go on and on.

That is what our program is. What's their program? Do away with the Canada Health Act and something else. Zap, you are frozen for five years; in their budget, zap, you are frozen for five years.

Health care workers, SEIU (Service Employees' International Union), people of the province of Saskatchewan, if we have made mistakes in health care, and we have, I want us to be judged not by the perfection and the ideal. I want us to be judged by the alternative. And the alternative is the Saskatchewan Party's commitment to freeze health care for five years, freeze health care for five years. Zap! You are frozen.

And when that gets out to the people of Saskatchewan, I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever where they are going to vote. They're going to vote for the party that invented medicare, that's renewing medicare, that supports medicare, and provides the best medicare system in all of Canada right here in Saskatchewan, right now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, when we hear the word “zapped”, I think the people of this province have been hearing it for the last eight years. Right after you took over you zapped 52 hospitals; you zapped the Plains hospital; you zapped the GRIP contract. You zapped everything that rural Saskatchewan stood for including our roads and our schools and our hospitals. You are the king of zapping, Mr. Premier.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Premier, you also talked about getting the message that you want to have out around this province. You've taken quotes out of this paper and quotes out of that paper and now you tell us you're going to send it around the province. Well you know what? I believe you. I believe you're going to use taxpayers' dollars to put whatever information you want to have them to have right across this province. You can put this word and this word together, and it doesn't matter if it's true; what it matters is they get the word that you want out.

Mr. Premier, this week I had an opportunity to speak to a person that I feel is very wise and has a lot of respect for many people. And this person told me that, she quoted to me something that says:

A people that cherishes its privileges more than its principles are in danger of losing both.

And when I think about that, Mr. Premier, I think about this government of yours and I say: a government that cherishes its privilege of governing more than it cherishes its principles — and that principle for you is supposed to be socialism; it's supposed to be something where you look after the vulnerable people of this society. Mr. Premier, if you really cherish your principles, then some of the things that you are doing wouldn't be happening. And you're going to lose them both. You're going to lose the governing of this province because people can't believe you any more. They can't trust you.

Mr. Premier, out in rural Saskatchewan . . . I'm sure that your people that represent areas in rural Saskatchewan are telling you rural Saskatchewan doesn't believe what your government is saying. They don't believe that you care about anything out in that area.

And, Mr. Premier, the social services recipients in this province — the ones that you are supposed to be standing up for, the ones that you tell them that I am the only one with a heart and a conscience, I'm the one that's going to be looking after you, should be worried about everybody else — those people can't even get off social services any more. The numbers have increased since you've got into this government. They've increased 20 per cent and higher.

Mr. Premier, we've got people out there, social workers who are overworked to the point of exhaustion just like the nurses are overworked to the point of exhaustion. And we've got people who would love to be off welfare but they can't get off because there's no jobs, there's no opportunities, and there's no hope for them.

So we've got the most vulnerable people in Saskatchewan are

stuck with you because you won't give them any hope and . . . You know what else you won't give them — is you won't allow them to be equal. You won't allow them to show that they can have some responsibility because they are kept under your thumb.

Mr. Premier, rural Saskatchewan people, people on social services, and the Aboriginal people of this province need to be allowed to have some responsibility. They want to go to work. They want to be considered equal. And they don't want to just take whatever you have left over after you invest money in Guyana and Channel Lake and SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) and whatever else comes along tomorrow.

Mr. Premier, give everybody a chance. Lower the taxes. Let people have for once a chance to have a voice in this province, and let all of our people be free of the burden of taxation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I'm assuming that the heart of the question of the member is a repetition stated differently . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Excuse me, if I may just answer it. Stated in a different way than the member from Melfort because her argument is, she ended up by saying lower the taxes and give the people a choice and lower the taxes.

Now I'm not going to repeat my arguments about taxes because we've lowered the taxes. I think that message is there. You can accept it or not accept it — it is there. I admit that we need to lower it more and we're going to work to try to lower it more — there's no doubt about that.

But I want to say to the hon. member opposite that when we talk about choices and to give the people choices, you had a choice when you got elected a Liberal and you jumped in the middle of the night to the Saskatchewan Party. Why didn't you give them the choice to say yes or no to what you did?

Why did you not, member from Saltcoats, why did you not? Why did you not do what the hon. member from Athabasca did — the honourable way? Why did you run from that choice? Tell me why? Why did you do that?

Why is it that you refused to go to the electorate and tell the people of the province of Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible) . . . Don't worry about the election. We're going to call the election quickly enough. Your arguments are absolutely . . .

An Hon. Member: — We didn't have . . . (inaudible) . . . two years ago.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Something, you got that *Way Up* thing again?

You know what that should be renamed? Not something . . . not the way up. It should be something's up. That's what it should be renamed. Something's up. Oh, oh, something's up.

Now I want to say, I want to say on the social assistance situation specifically the following. And this was a press release from the government:

The Social Services minister, Harry Van Mulligen, today released figures showing 4.5 per cent decline in the number of households receiving social assistance in southeastern Saskatchewan.

Province-wide the caseload has dropped from 35,631 at the end of December '97, to 34,000 at the end of December 1998. And this is consistent with an overall trend of declining caseloads that began in 1994. Caseload is down since 1994. And just this past year the income security caseload fell by more than 4 per cent.

Now should it be 10 per cent or 15 per cent? The answer is yes. Nobody wants to have a situation where people are earning their money with respect to caseloads on social assistance. That's why we've instituted a vision for the future called building independence. Training people, making sure they get off the trap of social welfare, making sure there's jobs and a growing economy. And it seems to be working — it seems to be working.

But I tell you what we will not do. We will not do what the Saskatchewan Party advocates — and that is to punish the poorest of the poor. We're not going to say, off the case rolls, like that, and good luck to you. That we will not do because that's not the Saskatchewan way of compassion and caring.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, I've watched this evening with great interest, your responses or lack thereof, certainly with respect to the member from Rosthern and your reluctance to answer them and the appeals to the Chair, and those kinds of things.

Mr. Premier, it reminds me, I think, of a government in its latter days. Yes, that's true. Yes, that's true. A government that's tired. A government that has a record in health care that's a complete disaster and the people of Saskatchewan know it. One that used to run around this province and say they are the great protectors of health care.

And yet you, sir, closed 52 hospitals in this province. You, sir, closed the Plains hospital. You, sir, caused the nurses strike in this province. You, sir, have resulted . . . your policies have resulted in the longest waiting lists in all of Canada. The worst record in terms of health care in all of Canada. That's your record in health care. And you stand before the people of Saskatchewan and defend that.

That's your record in health care. What's your record in agriculture? No plan whatsoever. Nothing. By your own measuring stick, you're a complete failure when it comes to delivering for agriculture. When it comes to highways in this province we have the worst possible stretches of highways anywhere, I would say, in Canada, if not all of North America.

When it comes to job creation in Saskatchewan or in Canada, we are the worst. Newfoundland, the Rock, has a better record in terms of job creation by far than you do, sir.

We have the worst record in item after item after item. And yet one thing that we do have that you seem to be proud of, is the

tax load. You stand and say that we the second lowest taxes in Canada, and yet every person in this province knows emphatically that we have the second highest when you take into terms all the tax load that people have to bear.

Yes, perhaps if you want to look at one isolated little piece of tax, yes, you might be able to point to an example of where we are the second lowest. In fact in your arguments in the budget, you talk about, of provinces with sales tax, we are the lowest. And yet people all across this province know that that's just a whole bunch of malarkey. They know that all they have to do is drive a few miles west of here and they can enter a province that has no sales tax whatsoever.

And that kind of doublespeak that you're so famous for, so famous for, doesn't cut it any longer with the people of Saskatchewan. Eight years in office, eight years. And all that you have to offer the people of Saskatchewan any longer, is the same tired old excuses. It's not my fault. Blame somebody else. Blame the federal government. Blame the previous administration. Blame the Saskatchewan Party. Blame the Liberal Party. Blame the independent members. Blame the media. Blame Conrad Black. Blame anyone that you can think about. Blame anyone in this province that you can think about and yet take no responsibility whatsoever for what you've done in office.

You know, I remember in 1991 when you were elected, sir. I remember very well. You were a government that came to office with ideas and plans. And I give you credit for that. I don't agree, I didn't agree with many of the things and still don't to this day, but at least you had a plan, at least you had ideas at that time. You came into this legislature, I recall very clearly, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and you had focus. There was no question about it. You had focus.

It may have been focus on entirely the wrong things by closing hospitals and stripping farmers of their livelihood in the GRIP contracts, but at least you had some degree of focus. Your focus on things like GRIP, hospital closures, turning highways back into gravel the member from Rosetown Elrose advocated at that time but at least you had some sort of plan before . . . to put before the people of Saskatchewan.

But what do you got today to offer? What do you have today to offer to the people of Saskatchewan? What do you have in terms of a platform, in terms of a plan to put before the people of Saskatchewan? You balanced the budget, yes; but how did you do it? You did it through raising utility rates. You did through it through raising taxes and every kind of revenue that you could possibly raise here in this province. Yes, you dropped the PST from 9 per cent down to 6 per cent, and that's to be congratulated and that's something this side of the House has been advocating right since 1991.

(2100)

But, Mr. Premier, you were the one who put it there in the first place. And all of the tired, old excuses about the 1980s aren't cutting it any longer with the people of Saskatchewan. Your second term has been an unmitigated disaster for the people of Saskatchewan. We've been faced with things . . . you used to talk about GigaText.

Well maybe you'd like to talk about NST (Network Services of Chicago) tonight. Maybe you'd like to talk about Channel Lake tonight. Maybe you'd like to talk about Guyana tonight. Maybe you'd like to talk about raising potatoes over at Beechy and Lucky Lake tonight. That's what the people of Saskatchewan would like to hear about tonight, Mr. Premier, is why, why did you get into those kind of ventures when all you did . . . your entire existence over the last number of years was criticize everything anybody had ever done in this province before that didn't work out. And now you have all of those kinds yourself that haven't worked out in Saskatchewan.

You know, Mr. Premier, you've been in politics a long time, you've been in politics almost as long as I've been alive — almost as long as I've been alive — 32 years you've been in government in one fashion or another. And it reminds me a little bit . . . it reminds me a lot of my father in a lot of ways. And I think it reminds a lot of people about their parents, their father, or their mother, or their grandfather, when they talk about the transition of power. You know it's difficult, sir, it's always difficult on farms or in a business or anything like that to look at the transfer of power, to look at those kinds of things because people don't want to relinquish whatever power they've been given.

Mr. Premier, we all must ask ourselves I guess from time to time how long should we hang on. How long should we hang on? We all have to ask ourselves that from time to time. Thirty-two years, 32 years illustrious service to the people of Saskatchewan, and they thank you for that. Now it's time, Mr. Premier, to think about change.

Mr. Premier, I've heard it said that real power is not something that you're given; it's something that you take. The people of Saskatchewan awarded you power, they gave you power, and I think they're close to wanting to take it away. The people of Saskatchewan gave you power, and now I think the people of Saskatchewan want an opportunity to take it back from you.

A government, Mr. Premier, and yourself reminds me this evening a little bit like an aging prizefighter, lashing out at everybody and anything that's in front of them, just simply, just simply not wanting to step aside. Just simply not wanting to step aside. Even Wayne Gretzky, Mr. Premier, I'll remind you, has gone away from the NHL (National Hockey League) these days.

I think, Mr. Premier, you're reluctant to look at the latest contenders. I think you're reluctant to look at the Saskatchewan Party and see it exactly the way the people of Saskatchewan see it, and that is a party that believes in hopes and dreams and opportunity.

Mr. Premier, I think it's time that you looked at your future. I think it's time you looked at your future. I think the people of Saskatchewan think it's time you looked at your future.

Over the years, sir, in private conversation with you, and you'll know this for sure, you've given me from time to time some political advice. Some of it was even good advice. Some of it was even good advice. Let me, Mr. Premier, let me, Mr. Premier, honestly give you a little advice tonight.

I think it's time for you to think about that transfer of power. I think it's time. I think the Young Turks, I think the Young Turks opposite, right in your own very benches, are thinking it's time for you to think about the transfer of power. Whether it's the House Leader, the Deputy Premier, the Finance minister, or all the others that have their unofficial leadership campaigns kicked off, I think it's time that you started thinking about that, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, I also think it's time that you started thinking about the election campaign that the people of Saskatchewan are asking for. I think it's time you started thinking about that. You've already kicked off . . . you've already kicked off a negative ad campaign. Something I didn't believe that you would ever do, sir, was resort to American-style attack ads in your campaign.

And the member from Shaunavon chirps from his seat. The member from Shaunavon always chirping from his seat. Well I say to you, sir — I say to you, sir — that come this election you're going to be in a lot of trouble down there. You're going to be in a lot of trouble down there, Mr. Shaunavon.

The Deputy Chair: — Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Boyd: — The Liberal Party in complete disarray. In their party they've got members like the member from North Battleford that isn't allowed to speak, isn't allowed to ask questions in question period, openly is defiant of the House Leader. They're saying to the media on every occasion that he can think of that he doesn't agree with the platform that that member has come up with.

Mr. Premier, I'm sure you're aware of that here in this province that the Liberal Party is disappearing. They're down into single digits in the polls these days, in spite of the fact that they've got a record that says that they want to raise taxes in Saskatchewan.

Can you imagine going into an election campaign, Mr. Premier, an election campaign that's saying to the people of Saskatchewan, we want to raise taxes. Hard to believe. Hard to believe. A little advice for you people, talking about raising taxes at election time is going to get you un-elected, sir.

Mr. Premier . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Chairman, the member chirps from his seat about his platform. His platform is four pages out of the budget estimates ripped out and a couple of little notes beside it. It's been called "How to Make Government Stupider" by some of the columnists here in Saskatchewan. And this is a platform that he says we would rather have. We wouldn't trade you platforms for anything, sir.

Just like I'm not surprised that the Premier of the province booted you out of his . . .

The Deputy Chair: — Order. I would encourage the . . . Order. Order. Order. I would encourage, if a couple of members want to have a private chat, they're welcome to do so. They're welcome to do so but this is Executive Council estimates.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Premier, the last, the last election we had you won in magnificent style and everyone recognizes that. I think this election campaign is

going to be a whole lot different. It appears that you're going to go to the people of Saskatchewan very soon and I think that's what they want.

I think the people of Saskatchewan also deserve some answers about a number of things. And I understand that the media are going to be asking you some questions about a few things like management services that you've had over the years; like Tommy Douglas House and how the operations of it operated over the last number of years. They're very interested in those comments, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, since we can't ask those kinds of questions in here, I don't know what the appropriate forum is. Apparently you think there is an appropriate forum. The appropriate forum apparently will be in a scrum outside before the . . . as the House closes down this evening.

Mr. Premier, the people of Saskatchewan want you to honour your commitment to go to the people in June. You've said consistently, you're going to go to the people of Saskatchewan on a timetable of every four years and that's exactly what they want.

I think they also want you to stop the attack ads. I think they also want you to defend your record. I think you also . . . They want you to bring forward your record and let it be judged against *The Way Up*. I think they want you to say in very, very plain terms what your future and what the future of the NDP is here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, I'm going to close by just saying that the people want you to honour your pledge to go to an election. They will have opportunity to judge — yes. They will have opportunity to cast judgment on each and every single one of us in terms of whether they want us re-elected or not.

Our platform I believe will stand the test of time and stand the scrutiny that the people of Saskatchewan will give it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Our platform speaks to opportunity; it speaks to hope; and it speaks to dreams. Our platform speaks to what the people of Saskatchewan are talking about all across this province in terms of tax relief, in terms of job creation, in terms of agriculture, in terms of education, in terms of health care, and all the other priorities that they have here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, we believe . . . Mr. Premier, we believe in hope. We don't believe in envy or jealousy like your party. We believe in dreams — not in holding people back like what you want to do to the people of Saskatchewan. We believe in opportunity, Mr. Premier — not in big government like what you believe in. We believe the people of Saskatchewan are asking for and now are demanding an election.

Mr. Premier, eight years in office as the Premier of this province is a long time. A nation builder for some 32 years is a long time. It's time now to think about the transfer of power. The people of Saskatchewan, I think, want that decision to be made right now, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Premier, I'll close by asking you: are you going to call an election very, very soon in the next few weeks so that the people of Saskatchewan have opportunity to judge your record?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Chairman, I must confess that in all my years as is pointed out by the hon. member from Kindersley who I find quite entertaining, and I think one of the more talented members of that caucus over there. I say this on a personal basis. I've tried to encourage him to stay in public life although I think almost everything that he stands for I totally disagree.

I will say one thing. I don't think in all my years of public life, in all my . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well don't be so arrogant. His voters have got to decide whether he's going to stay or not . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, maybe I did. But, Mr. Chairman, I've never had so many people from the opposition party caring after my very best interests as much as I have from the member from Kindersley. Boy, I should step out like Gretzky— that'd be great, you know, for me. I should get a succession going — that'd be great for me. I really know that you feel very, very warmly for my best interests so I thank you for those comments.

Let me be very brief on the question. I want to say a few things before I answer your question specifically. You talk about a negative ad. You can characterize it that way. Some people have characterized it that way. So who cares, I mean, if the reporters have . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No not our supporters.

What we have done, Mr. Chairman, on this ad is told the people what *The Way Up* will leave the province of Saskatchewan — \$1.8 billion added to the debt. That's the statement; that's the truth. If it's negative don't blame me, I didn't write your platform — blame yourself and the people who wrote it. I didn't say: zap, you're frozen for five years. It's telling the people the absolute facts.

Two other quick points I want to make and then I'll close — three points actually very quickly. On the question of our record, I mean I've said already right from day one we're going to be campaigning on our record. There's no way a government, even if they wanted to run from the record, can't but campaign their record. And we don't want to run from our record, we want to tell the people.

Here's what our record says partly on economic growth — not from the Saskatchewan Party, not from the Liberal Party, not from partisans, not even from the journalists. This is April 1, 1999: "This province, second only to Alberta, has significantly succeeded in lowering its debt," said Mary Webb, senior economist for Scotiabank, Wednesday, March 31.

(2115)

"The departing Tories left the New Democrats a \$15 billion debt in 1991. Saskatchewan found the revenues to replace the lost federal receipts for health and education," Webb said. "It's been a model of balancing." So says the senior economist for Scotiabank. So says the senior economist for the Scotiabank.

I'll give you one more; there are many. "Saskatchewan is entering its sixth straight year of economic growth," the Investment Dealers Association say. They credited the economic growth to sound financial management by the provincial government.

Quote: "The province in our view has moved consistently in the right direction in the last few years," says Ian Russell of the IDA, the Investment Dealers Association, Regina *Leader-Post*, May 14, 1998. That's part of our record. You're doggone right we're going to be talking about our record.

But now the second last point before I talk about the election. My advice to you, sir, because I have my best interests for you too at heart.

I have an article here from *The Press Review*, Tuesday March 30, 1999, an editorial by Verna Thompson, the editor of the particular journal. I know the member from Kindersley is very familiar with it. It's a little bit of a long passage but I think all members and all people of Saskatchewan should know what it says.

She said she attended a Saskatchewan Party meeting. And this is what she writes, and I'm going to read it to you:

Doom and gloom . . . doom and gloom reigned. In the past few days I've been at two Saskatchewan Party meetings and one NDP meeting. I've come away from both Saskatchewan Party meetings depressed and ready to slit my wrists with my fingernails.

I'm going to repeat that because they're not listening.

I came away from both . . .

Actually . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . No, no. The more I think of it, I think this . . . I think this might make this a good ad piece here.

I have come away from both Saskatchewan Party meetings depressed and ready to slit my wrists with my fingernails. I came away from the NDP meeting . . . I came away from the NDP meeting on a three-day high.

If the Kerrobert health care meeting is any indication, the Saskatchewan Party with this series of meetings is spreading doom and gloom and fear throughout rural Saskatchewan. Fear of hospital closures, fear of lack of services, fear the two-tier health system already exists in many minds, one for urban, one for rural, will worsen. Perhaps spreading fear is their main aim.

She says: "I hope not."

I want to stop from the quotation to say to Ms. Thompson: she asks the question perhaps spreading fear is their main aim. I say, Ms. Thompson, I say, members of this House, I say people in the province of Saskatchewan, not perhaps — that is their main aim because there's nothing else to sell in a positive vision when you're talking about a vision.

And then she goes on to this, and this is the heart . . . the part

... the point I want you to take to heart. She says:

It's fine to point out the government shortcomings. That's the job of opposition after all. But I would hope that in the future the meetings can be given a more positive spin. Tell the horror stories, blast the government, but then be positive about the future and about the Saskatchewan Party's platform.

My advice to the Saskatchewan Party for what it's worth is don't send people away into the night depressed and afraid like you tried to do today. Send them out on a high note excited about what you think you can do.

And the reason that they've never been able to do it, Mr. Chairman, is because they don't have a high note. They don't have a philosophy. They don't have a Saskatchewan way of caring or compassion. They don't have a vision except tax cuts, treat the poorest of the poor meanly and without any compassion and sympathy, and attack and attack and attack. That's why the editorial of Ms. Verna Thompson is written. Not Roy Romanow. Right from rural Saskatchewan, right from rural Saskatchewan.

And now finally, as for the election. An election is coming. An election will be coming so much so that based on what these people know their polling numbers are, it will be too fast for them whenever it takes place.

Because fundamentally, what the people of Saskatchewan know, fundamentally, at the core of the Achilles heel and at their very weakness of the Saskatchewan Party is this: they know that there was a fraudulent concoction of Liberals and Conservatives who got together in the middle of the night, whose principles are not known, the deals of which are not made known. They know that it lacks credibility and authenticity. They know that in addition to that, that their policies are too extreme, they're too imbalanced, they are too narrow, and they will run third in this provincial election. I guarantee you that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And to the Premier, I too have been sitting and listening with great deal of interest to the debate and some of it which unfortunately eluded to a debate about integrity on either side of this House. And I guess that's what, that's what bothers me, that we have to debate those kind of issues and ask those kind of questions when we do have people in the province who are now so confused about who is really in this premises with honesty, integrity, and trust. I think they're becoming more and more cynical as to the purposes, the reasons that some of these people ... is it their own self-interest or is it actually the people of the province.

And I guess the other thing that's confusing to the people as well and we talk ... Mr. Premier, Mr. Chairman, I've seen the Premier refer to some previous comments and statements and he's heard some of these before and they are his. And once again it begs the question, when commitments are made and not kept, it raises a concern about whether or not there should be a continuing support for a government that makes commitments and then doesn't keep them.

And let me ... I'd just like to quote from *Hansard*, April 22, 1991:

... Mr. Speaker, in terms of my objectives, before I adjourn the debate, I want to just say a brief word about the business of the quality of life as part of our agenda. I've talked about these five points in the context of our philosophy as a contrast of what they've done over 9 to 10 years. (This is when the Premier was the Leader of the Opposition.) Quality of life, that's what politics is all about at the end of the day. That's why we want the financial house in order so that we can manage our programs the way our community, called Saskatchewan, wants it. That's why we want to create jobs and keep the farmers working and the small towns surviving.

It doesn't seem to be happening. That opportunity's been given and it doesn't seem to be happening. I'll continue with the quote:

Quality of life for our families, and their children, and their children, and for our neighbours and our communities.

Unfortunately since that time a lot of those children and their children have had to leave this province. Our philosophy of the '90s — people helping people. That's the way we've always done it in this province. That's what it's all about and there's a big agenda.

Mr. Speaker, it is an outrage and a blight on this great province of Saskatchewan that today we have either the second highest or the highest rate of poverty of anybody in Canada. Has that improved? I think people are asking today, 10 years later, almost 10 years later. Has that in fact improved? I don't think so and that's what's confusing to our electorate. That's why people don't trust any politicians any more.

I go on with the quote:

I never thought I'd say that. I never thought in my years of politics that the growth industry was food banks, thanks to those people opposite (speaking about the Tories who were in power during those years), either uncaring or forgetting of this. That's quality of life. Children who do not have nourishment or opportunities to grow. Think of the social and other problems which are attached to it. And these people are smug in giving the amount for child poverty which is equal to the salary of Mr. Chuck Childers.

Those were the comments on that day ... (inaudible interjection) ... Childers, Childers, whatever. "Equality and fairness; there's a big agenda for quality of life." And I agree.

What's changed? And your comments going on about the terrible state of health care and the closure of beds and the closure of hospitals. I guess it's confusing, it's confusing because nothing has changed. What's become better in this last eight years?

After those kinds of statements and commitments were made, hospitals were closed. Our health care system has been turned into turmoil. A commitment in the 1995 election to fight to keep the Plains open — that was a commitment made by

members on the government side, members running for election arm in arm with the Premier, that they would fight to save the Plains hospital.

That's what confuses people, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Premier. They are wondering why after 120,000 people from across this province said: please, don't close that hospital we so desperately need. Did the government listen? No, they didn't. Mr. Premier, people virtually begged — were pleading right across the province.

That was bad enough. That was an ill-thought-out decision. There couldn't have been a plan. There couldn't have been.

I'm going to quote again from that teahouse in Lebret, a unique little teahouse and craft house, where it says on the wall: "Action without a vision is a nightmare." And that's obviously what's happened with our health care system, particularly the Plains.

People don't understand why it was closed. But the thing they don't understand even more so is why it was closed a year in advance of other facilities that could have accommodated our sick, reduced our waiting lists? Why it was closed a year in advance of its targeted date? Why were people confused and having to wear hard hats while looking for places they needed to go for diagnostic treatment and surgery within the Regina General Hospital, a facility where there still is no light at the end of the tunnel as when it's going to be actually completed.

People don't have a place to park, they don't have accessibility to that hospital. And yet a year in advance you close a facility that should have been there for the people of this province.

You know, I just . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well I did lose it for a minute. This really distresses me as to why commitments are made and actions taken without any real plans, and it throws everybody in a great deal of chaos.

Yet . . . And I've heard it earlier. I mean there's been some bantering back and forth and it reminded me of the comment that the facts, although interesting, are irrelevant. And I think that comment was made a little earlier.

The doom and gloom and fear that we've been accused of, the Liberal caucus has been accused of spreading, has not been doom and gloom. It has come from front-line health care workers. Comments that I expressed this morning as a result of a letter to the editor from a front-line health care worker, from a doctor. Doctors and nurses who are telling us that we've got a serious problem.

Our nursing problem is not one that just happened overnight. Mr. Premier, there were 600 nurses fired back in 1993 or 1994. What was the justification? What kind of plan was in place? Who in their right mind — was there anybody thinking — that we could just eliminate 600 nurses and then rely on recovering those very vital and essential services?

I don't know about you, sir, but it bothers me. It distresses me because we're not getting younger in years. And I hope I won't need the services of some of those very valuable people, at least not in the immediate future. I hope it's a long time down the

road, both for you and I and all the colleagues here in the legislature.

But when the time comes, it just scares the living daylights out of me that by that time we may have some good highways, but when the ambulance gets us without hitting any bumps to the hospital, there won't be anybody there to greet us. We won't have the surgeons. We won't have the specialists. We won't have the nurses to take care of us when we need to be looked after, when we can't look after ourselves.

So I just want to emphasize the fact that we have been speaking about the priorities of people of this province. We have been talking about health care. We've been talking about highways. We've been talking about education for our young people. We need to have some comfort for people to assure them that they will be able to continue to live in this great province to survive, to have some economic activity that will give them some hope for the future, Mr. Premier.

(2130)

And I . . . There's no need for you to respond. I just want you to be aware that the priorities that we have for consideration of the future of the people of this province are those of the people of this province — no hidden agendas, no personal agendas, but those issues that people have come to us with, have written to us, have called us, and have asked to bring to your attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Subvotes (EX01), (EX02), (EX07), (EX04), (EX03), (EX08), (EX06) agreed to.

Vote 10 agreed to.

Motions for Supply

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. May it be:

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on account of certain charges and expenses of public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1999, the sum of \$398,522,000 be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Resolved that towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty on account of certain charges and expenses of the public service for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2000, the sum of \$4,252,950,000 be granted out of the General Revenue Fund.

Motion agreed to.

The Chair: — Before putting the question to the resolution that the Government House Leader has moved, this being the last chance that I will have at the mike that I would like to say a few thank you's to some people. And many people inside and outside this building, as everybody knows, are responsible for

making a session run smoothly and keeping it going. I do want to take a moment to thank some of those people.

Firstly of course, the pages who spoil the members of the Legislative Assembly by keeping your water supplied and running errands to and from. I certainly want to thank Melanie, Sheena, Kris, Dean and Darcy for a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Also in Journals that write up things every day and then keep things even and on an even keel, there's Marilyn and also a special one to Rose Zerr who will not be here when we come back. I understand that Rose is retiring after some 30 years and I want to take this opportunity to thank her for her past work in this Assembly and in this building and wish her all the best in her retirement.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: — Also I guess to thank *Hansard* who, in my opinion, operate under very stressed conditions. They operate in another building, outside of the building because of the renovations. Also the people in our caucus offices; the staff in the Speaker's office, Linda, Margaret and Rhonda; and of course in the Clerk's office, Pam, Monique and Pam; broadcasting, Gary and Ihor and Kerry; visitors' services; the library; financial services; and of course Pat Shaw and the security people within the building.

And of course for me as the Chair and as Deputy Speaker, one of the most important for us to thank is the Clerks at the Table. That without them we would be less consistent and so I want to take a special thank you to Gwenn and Greg and Meta at the Table, along with my Co-Chair and the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: — I also want to thank the hon. member from Regina Coronation Park who co-chairs the committees with me and does a good job with me. And also the help that I've got from Speaker Hagel. Also thank you to the members and to your families for the time they spent behind the scenes.

So I want to say a minute that I realize that there may be in fact . . . I hear rumours that there may be an election before we come back here, and as in most elections there's going to be some changes made. I've enjoyed serving in this legislature with all of you and I wish you all the best in the upcoming election — all members.

And to those who are not running again, thank you for your service to your constituents, to the people of Saskatchewan. In my opinion you've been part of the greatest institution in our province and I'm delighted to say that it's been my greatest gain to have been able to serve with you.

With that, I wish everyone a good summer. Once again, all the best in . . . if the rumours of an election are true.

The committee reported progress.

FIRST AND SECOND READING OF RESOLUTIONS

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the resolutions be now read the first and second time.

Motion agreed to and the resolutions read a first and second time.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Pursuant to an order of the Assembly I move:

That Bill No. 45, An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of Money for the Public Service for the Fiscal Years ending respectively on March 31, 1999 and on March 31, 2000 be now introduced and read the first time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a first time.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — By order of the Assembly and under rule 55(2), I move that the Bill be now read a second and third time.

Motion agreed to and the Bill read a second and third time and passed under its title.

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, with leave, to move to motions to return (debatable).

Leave granted.

(2145)

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Return No. 4

Ms. Draude: — I move an order of the Assembly do issue for return (debatable) no. 4. Seconded by the member from Kindersley.

Motion negated on division.

Return No. 5

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 5 showing:

To the Minister of Health: (1) the number of District Health Boards that have completed and submitted their three-year strategic plan to the provincial government; (2) the necessary elements set out by the provincial government that are to be included in these three-year strategic plans; (3) when the districts were to have their three-year strategic plans completed and submitted to the provincial government.

I so move, seconded by the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 6

Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member of Kindersley, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 6:

To the Minister of Health, the total costs of production and placement of the anti-nurses advertising campaign currently (previously) run by the Government of Saskatchewan.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 10

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member for Kindersley, an Order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 10.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, before we vote on this motion I just wanted to make a comment. I'd like to bring to your attention that this year that there were 65 written questions asked of the government. Three of these were not dealt with simply because the members were not here, Mr. Speaker.

Of those 65, all the rest have been dealt with. And all but one has been answered. And there have also not been any amendments, Mr. Speaker. And that speaks well to the members who have set the questions because it meant that they certainly were not ambiguous and the departments were able to answer the questions.

I want to mention that, Mr. Speaker, that this government is committed to making democracy work. We are trying to do this in order to be able to continue to improve confidence of the public in politicians and in this legislature by making the information available as timely as possible. We want to put the floodlight on the issues rather than trying to sweep them under the rug, Mr. Speaker.

In all over the past two sessions with the exception of the three we have dealt with 146 questions. That's meant we've dealt with 143 questions and answered all but two of them, and we'll be answering this one as well. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

MOTIONS**House Adjournment**

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the member from Regina Victoria:

That when this Assembly adjourns at the end of this sitting day, it shall stand adjourned to a date and time set by Mr. Speaker upon the request of the government, and that Mr. Speaker shall give each member seven clear days notice if possible of such date and time.

Mr. Speaker, we were going to try to sneak out without our

thank you's, but actually I think we would rather say our thank you's before we sneak out. So I would like to begin by thanking a number of people and I'm sure the Leader of the Opposition or the House Leader on the opposite side would like to do the same.

I'd like to begin first of all by thanking all of the hon. members. Although we obviously have our differences within this Chamber, we are here to serve our constituents and the people of the province.

I'd also like to thank the House Leaders, particularly the member from Cannington who I think has the patience of Job and I really appreciate his patience in dealing with some of our issues.

I'd like to thank the Speaker for your impartial rulings and for keeping us at least partially in order throughout this process.

I'd like to thank the Legislative Assembly staff, particularly the Clerk of the Assembly, Gwenn Ronyk, who ably advises all of us and she is ably assisted as well by Greg Putz, Margaret Woods, Monique Lovatt, and Pam Scott. And of course, without ever having to draw his sabre once, the very capable Patrick Shaw, the Sergeant-at-Arms and his security staff.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — As well, we have five very capable young people, pages of the Assembly, who I would like to mention by name: Melanie Bratkoski, Darcy Criddle, Dean Mulhall, Kris Parker, Sheena Simonson, and I'm sure we'd like to thank them for their service to us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — I'd also like to thank the *Hansard* staff: Judy Brennan, Donelda Klein, and the staff who report on everything that we say in the Chamber, sometimes to our great pleasure and sometimes not as pleasing to us, but I'd like to thank them as well.

I'd like to thank the *Journals* staff, the visitor services staff, the Legislative Counsel and Law Clerk, Garnet Holtzmann. And I'd also like to thank all of the other people in the building who keep this place running — the ministers' offices, the caucus offices, our constituency offices out there, House business offices, Executive Council, and anybody else who I may have missed.

And just before I close I'd like to thank Marian Powell and the Legislative Library, the cafeteria staff, the SPMC (Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation) staff. I guess we should thank the press for the number of times that they get the story right for us. And if we don't want to rely on the press for our reports we can watch directly on television what's happening, so I'd like to thank Gary Ward and his staff for their work they do.

In closing I wish all members well as we return to our constituencies and are accountable to the real bosses, the people of Saskatchewan. So I wish you all well and we'll see . . . we will be back and we will see some of you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's indeed an honour and a privilege to rise on behalf of my colleagues to issue a few thank you's as well. And I know a number of them will be repetitious in nature but I think we have that flexibility tonight, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by thanking you. I know you are the first elected Speaker of this Assembly and I can tell you very, very sincerely on behalf of our caucus we have appreciated the role that you have played. I think the kind of responsibility that you brought to that chair has indeed encouraged myself as an individual to recognize just how strong democracy is and the fact that we have that ability to function in this House because of your role. And I want to thank you and your staff very, very sincerely.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — I want to recognize the Clerk's office of course, with Gwenn and Greg and Margaret. Thank you very much for your help. It's been a great assistance to us. To you, Gwenn, congratulations on your 25 years in your involvement in this House and congratulations on many more.

To the pages, as indicated, to Melanie, Darcy, Dean, Kris and Sheena, thank you very much for your help. As my colleague has indicated, you're not true members of the Assembly until you've become pirates — for whatever that means.

I want to thank Pam Scott and Monique also for their assistance. Collectively, of course, Mr. Speaker, all the people in financial services — and I don't want to name all of those — have been very, very helpful in terms of making sure that we do things correctly and we appreciate that.

To all the staff at *Hansard*, I appreciate their fine work. To *Journals* staff, to the Visitor Services staff, to the cafeteria staff: all have helped make our stay here at the Legislative Assembly very, very enjoyable.

Special mention I think has been made by the Deputy Speaker, of a lady by the name of Rose Zerr, who of course after, I believe, 30 years of service is now retiring. Rose, we wish you well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Three gentlemen in broadcast services of course spend a lot of hours watching television screens and making sure that we have an excellent broadcast system that is around the province. And I know, Mr. Speaker, you are trying to encourage the spread of that system, and we want to see that happen right across the province. So to Gary and Ihor and Kerry, thank you very much for all that you have done.

Sergeant Pat Shaw and all of the commissioners in the building who keep us safe and make sure that the building functions well, we want to thank you.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very, very important all of us rely on our staffs. And I want to sincerely thank Reg Downs, our

chief of staff, and all of the people that work here in the Assembly with us, in our caucus office, and back home in our constituency offices. They are our right hand arms, of course, and we want to make sure that they are thanked for all of their wonderful contributions.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to all of the members opposite and to all of the colleagues . . . my colleagues on this side of the House, I've enjoyed the four years that we have been here very, very much. I've cherished the fact that we are here to serve the people of Saskatchewan and that it has indeed been an honour and a privilege to stand in this House, to be part of democracy and the running of the province of Saskatchewan. I, along with my colleagues, take, I think, a very special degree of pride in representing the people of Saskatchewan.

As the House Leader for the government has indicated, we do anticipate a general election and we want to ensure that we have an honourable election. And on behalf of my colleagues, I want to wish everyone well. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All the people that were mentioned, I would like to extend on behalf of the Liberal caucus our sincere appreciation.

To you, Mr. Speaker, just one extra little bit of acknowledgement. With all due respect to your predecessors, you have brought a great deal of vitality not only in the House but also to the rural areas where . . . where young people at the schools really appreciate and enjoy having visited with you.

So I thank you for that. I think it's very important.

I just had a thought. I know that I've been cautioned and sort of told to be very brief, and I'm going to be. Just to extend all my sincere best wishes to everybody as well. Just to have people remember that the reason we're here is to criticize behaviour and not people, and I think we should remember that in our mutual respect for one another.

And I'm hoping, as I'm sure everybody is, that we will once again be given the grave responsibility of representing our constituents — the people that employ us. I sincerely mean that.

And I wish everybody well. I'm going to miss some of you.

Finally, a thank you to the ministerial staff who respond on behalf of their cabinet ministers to those issues that we bring to them from our constituencies on behalf of our constituents and their responses to that. I appreciate that very much, as do the people I represent.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2200)

The Speaker: — The Chair would ask if it would be acceptable to the members of the Assembly to also make comments before putting the question. If there is no objection.

The Chair would like to join you in acknowledging the support of a number of people. And I understand that I will be somewhat repetitive to some of your remarks as well. But I would first of all like to recognize someone who is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I appreciate the recognition you've also given her.

I'd like to just add a little bit to the information about her contribution to the Assembly, not just now but over a period of time. I'm referring of course to Rose Zerr who is seated in the Speaker's gallery, together with her colleague from Journals, Marilyn Kotylak.

And, hon. members, with the adjournment of the House this day, that this day will mark the last sitting day in the career of the Legislative Assembly's longest serving staff member, Rose Zerr. Rose has served the Legislative Assembly as Journals Clerk for 30 years which has already been remarked, and she will be retiring on June 30 of this year.

The Journals Clerk is responsible on a daily basis for the overnight production of the *Votes and Proceedings* and the order paper, and at the close of the session, the Journals Clerk is responsible for the preparation of the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, the volume that constitutes the legal and the official record of the business conducted by this Legislative Assembly.

And almost single-handedly, Rose Zerr has piloted the Journals branch through successive changes in production technology from clip and paste mock-ups to hot lead printing, through paper tape readers and linotron typesetters, and through three successively more sophisticated computer publishing systems to the current of desktop publishing and Internet distribution.

Rose's knowledge of Journals makes her our resident expert on the practices and the precedents and the history of the House proceedings. She will be greatly missed, believe me, and I would ask her to stand and to receive your appreciation for her service during this session and for the past 30 years, and we wish her well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — May I join you as well in expressing appreciation to Marian Powell and the Legislative Library staff who nourished our minds during the session, as well as Trent Brears and the staff in the Dome Cafeteria who nourished our tummies. To Marilyn Borowski and Linda Kaminski and the staff of financial services, administrative services, who have ensured that we've always had the resources to serve our constituents and we've had them in a timely manner.

I also want to, on your behalf, send thank you's to Marianne Morgan who has done a commendable job filling in leading the visitor services, and her staff; to Garnet Holtzmann, Alisson Gartner and Kathy Beck of the Legislative Law Clerk's office; to Sergeant-at-Arms, Pat Shaw and the security staff who provide the security with such dignity; to Gary Ward, Ihor Sywanyk, and Kerry Bond in the broadcast services as has been mentioned who are sending the same signal extremely effectively across the province.

And also to the tireless troupers at *Hansard*, under the leadership of Judy Brennan and Donelda Klein. Hon. members, *Hansard* is produced and on-line within short hours of adjournment each day. And this is a work that is done with good cheer by the unsung heroes of the session, and in many ways they are the dynamic team who are the backbone of the public record of our proceedings.

I also want to send my thanks to Monique Lovatt and Pam Scott and the Clerk's office.

And to also say thanks to the staff of the Speaker's office for their daily assistance in facilitating the access of the members to the Speaker — to Margaret Kleisinger, Linda Spence, and Rhonda Romanuk. Some have called them superb and others have called them incredible, and who am I to argue with that.

Hon. members you've recognized the work of our pages and I'd like to reintroduce them to you this evening the same way we did on the first day of the fourth session of the twenty-third legislature and to ask them to stand and individually receive, finally your appreciation for the service to you over the session.

And let me then reintroduce them to you again in the order that I did on day one: Melanie Bratkoski; is Darcy here tonight, so to Darcy Criddle as well; and to Dean Mulhall; and Kris Parker; and finally Sheena Simonson.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I join you as well in expressing appreciation to the work of the Clerk, Gwenn Ronyk, for this session and the past 25 years, but particularly for the four sessions that it has been my privilege to serve as your presiding officer. To Deputy Clerk, Greg Putz, as well to Assistant Clerk, Meta Woods, who have provided sound and reliable procedural advice to you and to me.

Hon. members, it's been my privilege to serve this House with very capable support and the services of the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chair of Committees. It has been our objective as presiding officers to be a team that prides itself in serving you with fairness and with consistency. And I thank the other presiding officers for your efforts.

And finally, hon. members, I want to say my final word of thanks to you as this may be the final meeting of the twenty-third legislature. Let me say thank you to you all for your service to the people of Saskatchewan — especially to those of you hon. members who will not be standing for re-election. To those of you standing again, I hope that the process of democracy will serve both you and your constituents well.

And finally, hon. members, those of us elected to serve in this twenty-third legislature have been concerned for some time about the respect that the people of this great province have for this noble institution. And surely we have no right to expect that those people will hold higher respect for the institution than we exhibit toward each other.

And in that regard I have noted that during this session, hon. members, you have been vigorous in your participation, to state

the obvious, but equally true. And perhaps more importantly, you have avoided character attacks and generally conducted your business with a high level of respect for one another and for this institution. I commend your commitment.

And I thank you for the honour that you have given me to serve as your Chair and your representative and I say thank you to you all.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 10:09 p.m. His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took his seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 21 - The Coroners Act, 1999
- Bill No. 5 - The Municipal Hail Insurance Act, 1999
- Bill No. 20 - The Business Corporations Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 2 - The Municipal Employees' Pension Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 19 - The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 1 - The Child and Family Services Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 15 - The University of Regina Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 302 - The Group Medical Services Act, 1999
- Bill No. 303 - The Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts Act
- Bill No. 304 - The Saskatchewan Medical Association Act
- Bill No. 301 - The Credit Union Central of Saskatchewan Act, 1999
- Bill No. 22 - The Special Payment (Dependent Spouses) Act
- Bill No. 29 - The Health Information Protection Act
- Bill No. 26 - The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 1999
- Bill No. 16 - The Mineral Taxation Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 32 - The Corporation Capital Tax Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 33 - The Tobacco Tax Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 34 - The Education and Health Tax Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 40 - The Income Tax Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 35 - The Land Information Services Facilitation Act
- Bill No. 30 - The Cemeteries Act, 1999
- Bill No. 31 - The Funeral and Cremation Services Act
- Bill No. 37 - The Snowmobile Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 38 - The Litter Control Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 39 - The Wildlife Habitat Protection Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 11 - The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 41 - The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 1999
- Bill No. 42 - The New Generation Co-operatives Act
- Bill No. 43 - The New Generation Co-operatives Consequential Amendment Act, 1999 / Loi de 1999 apportant des modifications corrélatives à la loi intitulée The New Generation

Co-operatives Act

Bill No. 36 - The Animal Protection Act, 1999

Bill No. 44 - The Midwifery Act

Bill No. 25 - The Education Amendment Act, 1999 / Loi de 1999 modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur l'éducation

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name I assent to these Bills.

Bill No. 45 - An Act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of Money for the Public Service for the Fiscal Years ending respectively on March 31, 1999 and on March 31, 2000

His Honour: — In Her Majesty's name, I thank the Legislative Assembly, accept their benevolence, and assent to this Bill.

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 10:14 p.m.

The Speaker: — This House now stands adjourned until the call of the Chair.

The Assembly adjourned at 10:16 p.m.