

The Assembly met at 13:30

Prayers

#### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

#### PRESENTING PETITIONS

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Cypress Hills constituency, and residents actually throughout the province who have signed this.

The petition addresses their concerns about the implications of the Saskatchewan EMS (emergency medical services) development project report. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and to affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition, Mr. Speaker, was signed by residents of Tompkins, Webb, Stewart Valley, Swift Current, Regina, Qu'Appelle, and Gull Lake.

I so present.

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

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition signed by citizens concerned about conversion of paved highways back to gravel. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to set aside any plans to revert Saskatchewan highways back to gravel; commit that the government will not download responsibility for current numbered highways onto local governments; and to consult with local residents and to co-operate in finding and implementing other alternatives.

And this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Briercrest and Moose Jaw.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in my home community who are concerned about the state of the regional hospital there. And the prayer of this petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to carefully consider Swift Current's request for a new hospital.

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

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by the good people of

Swift Current.

I so present.

**Ms. Bakken:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy who are concerned about their community-based ambulance services, and the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to not implement the consolidation and centralization of ambulance services as recommended in the EMS report and affirm its intent to work to improve community-based ambulance services.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

I so present on behalf of the good people of Trossachs, Bengough, Coronach, and Big Beaver.

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

#### READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

**Clerk:** — According to order the following petition has been reviewed and pursuant to rule 12(7) it is hereby read and received:

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly regarding the centralization of ambulance services.

#### NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

**Mr. Wiberg:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 10 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management): (a) for the year 1999, what was the total amount of fish taken from Saskatchewan lakes for reasons of personal and commercial fishing; and (b) for the year 1999, what was the total amount of restocking of fish that took place in Saskatchewan lakes.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have a second question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 10 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of SERM again: (a) for the year 2000, what was the total amount of fish taken from Saskatchewan lakes for reasons of personal and commercial fishing; and (b) for the year 2000, what was the total amount of restocking of fish that took place in Saskatchewan's lakes.

#### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. Hillson:** — Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you this afternoon and welcome to the Assembly, Chief Mel Isnana who is Chief of Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. He has been chief for 19 years. He also informs me that although his band has lived in the Fort Qu'Appelle area since 1862, they have had historic problems being recognized as Canadians. That problem this year has been resolved and the Dakota Nations

Standing Buffalo will sign . . . (inaudible) . . . to Treaty Four later this year.

So please welcome the Chief Mel Isnana.

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

**Hon. Mr. Osika:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also add my voice to the welcome to Chief Mel Isnana, with whom I've had some previous discussions, and he lives in the Standing Buffalo First Nations, which I might add is a very progressive community in my constituency. And I would also like to welcome Chief Mel Isnana to the Assembly here this afternoon.

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

**Ms. Julé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like add to the welcome that other members of the House have put forward to Chief Mel Isnana, Chief of Standing Buffalo First Nations.

Welcome to the Assembly. We do hope that you enjoy the proceedings today and good luck in your endeavours.

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

**Hon. Ms. Lorjé:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome Chief Mel Isnana to the Legislative Assembly, and I look forward to going out and having further meetings regarding the Treaty Four and participating in the signing.

And while I'm at it, I would like to introduce another member from Standing Buffalo Reserve. Sitting right directly behind the Chief in the Speaker's Gallery is my intermediate ministerial assistant, Pearl Yuzicappi, a very proud member of Standing Buffalo Reserve and an excellent person who's teaching me an awful lot. And I really appreciate her fine work.

And I hope that everyone in the House will welcome both the Chief and Pearl to this Assembly.

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

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly, a gentleman seated in your gallery, a Mr. Keith Brown of Trailtech Industries in Gravelbourg. Trailtech employs 80 to 100 people in the town of Gravelbourg, building trailers. And I hope all members of this Assembly will welcome Mr. Brown here today, one of the great entrepreneurs that makes rural Saskatchewan work.

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

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the House, I'd like to introduce a friend of mine, Deborah Bryson-Saraver from Humboldt.

She's in the city to attend the conference that'll start later on today on If Gender Mattered . . . She wrote a paper on domestic

abuse in rural Saskatchewan. I look forward to hearing her at the conference tomorrow.

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

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

### Junior Achievement of Northern Saskatchewan Awards

**Mr. Weekes:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure this past Saturday evening of attending the Junior Achievement of Northern Saskatchewan Awards and banquet held in Saskatoon. The mission statement of Junior Achievers is to inspire and educate young Canadians to value free enterprise, understand business and economics, and develop entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

This year marks the 24th year that Junior Achievement has offered the company program to the students of Saskatoon and area. The group also includes dedicated companies from Prince Albert and North Battleford.

These young students have spent the last 23 weeks learning the fundamentals of business while developing their leadership and communication skills. All participants in Junior Achievers have certainly demonstrated their growth and proficiency in all these areas.

Some of the awards that were handed out were the ESSO Teamwork Award, Salesperson of the Year, Most Valued President and Vice Presidents, Best First Year Achiever, Spirit of Junior Achiever Award, Shareholders Report of the Year, Production Excellence, SaskEnergy Educator Award, Most Improved Company, Overall Tradeshow Award, Global Television Commercial Contest, Professional Leadership Award, Canjac Award/Achiever of the Year, and Company of the Year.

Company of the year was won by a group that was sponsored by the Rotary Club of North Battleford. The company was named Grassroots.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Addley:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, March 24, Junior Achievement of Northern Saskatchewan, including Saskatoon and area, North Battleford, and Prince Albert, held its Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame Award ceremony in Saskatoon. A wonderful evening celebrating young people who are making a difference and being successful, right here in Saskatchewan.

With the support of parents, businesses, volunteers, and educators, students have the opportunity to form a business corporation, produce and sell a product, keep sales records, marketing, and provide an annual report. Based on this work, 19 outstanding winners were selected, each worthy of recognition.

Our province is richer for the contributions of all those who are recognized and nominated. Unfortunately time does not permit me to name all of the winners but, Mr. Speaker, they cover

every aspect of being entrepreneurial — from Salesperson of the Year, Brett Bates to company of the year, Grassroots.

We should also salute the many Saskatchewan companies whose assistance makes these awards possible. This is quite a neighbourhood we live in, Mr. Speaker. My congratulations to all of the award winners, their sponsors, and junior achievement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Burstall Hosts Provincial Junior Juvenile Curling Championships**

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Burstall Curling Club was the recent host of the Saskatchewan Provincial Junior Juvenile Curling Championships, March 16 to 19 of this year. And 16 teams, coaches, parents, and fans from all over Saskatchewan came together in Burstall for that championship.

Hosting an event such as this requires many hours of dedicated effort to ensure success. Now according to all reports, everything went extremely well and members of the host committee couldn't have been happier. Some team members even commented about the quality of ice in Burstall, comparing it favourably to the ice that they curled on right here in Regina. The people of Burstall can take pride in the work carried out by their community in order to realize their accomplishments in hosting this very successful event.

A little further south, Mr. Speaker, the Fox Valley senior boys curling team of Ryan Deis, Brendan Myers, David Bosch, and Colin Obritsch won the Southwest Athletic Conference District Curling Title in Cabri, earning them the right to represent the southwest at the provincial SHSAA (Saskatchewan High Schools Athletic Association) curling playdowns here in Regina March 1 to 3. The curling team achieved a fourth place finish at the provincials, and I would like to congratulate them on their achievement. And congratulations too, to their coaches, James Deis and Dean Schmitz.

In the athletic realm, Mr. Speaker, Fox Valley continues to shine in a variety of sports.

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

#### **Internet Services in Rural Saskatchewan**

**Mr. Kasperski:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) television recently read a story on the general difficulty rural people in Canada have of getting quality Internet service.

Mr. Speaker, any community without access to the Internet economy and without the tools to function in that economy will eventually be marginalized. However, Mr. Speaker, CBC did find good rural Internet service somewhere in the country. Not in Alberta, Mr. Speaker; not even in Ontario, Mr. Speaker; but in Craik, Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the CBC television program I'm talking about interviewed Mr. Thad Swidzinski of Craik who said during the program, and I quote:

I think right now that our children, I can honestly say are on par with city schools.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is rising to the challenge. SaskTel's 99 per cent digitally switched telephone network can provide advanced telephoning services to all areas of the province, including high speed Internet capability to North Battleford, Lloydminster, Weyburn, Estevan, Yorkton, Swift Current, Humboldt, Tisdale, Nipawin, Melfort, Kindersley, Meadow Lake, Melville, and Moosomin, Mr. Speaker.

Our Crown corporation sector reinvests in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, they don't have access to service like that of SaskTel's in the states that border along us. Which goes to show, Mr. Speaker, that strong Crown corporations make for a strong province. Thank you.

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

(13:45)

#### **Women's Secretariat Conference**

**Ms. Draude:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to inform all members of the House of a very important conference that is being hosted by the Women's Secretariat. Mr. Speaker, the Women's Secretariat is holding a conference entitled *If Gender Mattered . . . Policy and Strategies to Advance Women's Equality*.

Mr. Speaker, over the next couple of days women from all over the province will be joining together to discuss ways in which women in all walks of life can overcome some of the obstacles they face — be it family-related or work-related.

There are a variety of workshops including violence against women, housing policies, and cultural equality for Aboriginal women, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to attending the conference and commend all of the organizers involved for all their hard work and dedication in advancing women's issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Drop-in Centre for Women Opens**

**Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen:** — Mr. Speaker, this Saturday I was happy to attend the opening of a new drop-in centre for women in Regina. The centre is called Visitation House.

The Archdiocese of Regina has created this centre as a place for women where they can go for a visit, talk, have coffee, and find people willing to listen and help in whatever way they can.

The name Visitation House is inspired by the account in the Gospel of Luke of the visit of Mary to her relative, Elizabeth — a story of women coming together out of mutual affection in order to provide mutual support.

The centre then will be open for women with special needs: low income women, young mothers, women in transition, women

who are coping with any number of problems, from violence to addiction to loneliness. The centre will be a place of quiet, of reflection, and of assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is known for our spirit of volunteerism. At least 22 volunteers will be working at the centre, working under the very capable direction of Cheryl Dudgeon, the executive director, and support worker, Theresa Schikowsky.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Archdiocese of Regina, with special thanks to His Grace Archbishop Peter Mallon for his interest and support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

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

#### RCMP Training Academy New Graduates

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this morning I had the special privilege of attending a very special swearing-in ceremony at the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) academy here in Regina.

Mr. Speaker, graduating today as one of 23 new RCMP constables is a very special friend of ours Pat Santo, and the significance of today's ceremony is the fact that just a week ago his daughter, Tracy Santo, graduated as an RCMP constable.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at a father-daughter . . . last week I believe we had a mother and a daughter on the front page of the news — what it says is that individuals . . . parents and children can certainly work together as they pursue new careers. In this case, for Pat Santo he's leaving the farm and now entered the area of police work and is scheduled to go to Chilliwack, BC (British Columbia).

I want to extend this morning to both Pat and his daughter, Tracy, congratulations on having achieved a very special goal in their lives.

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

#### PanCanadian Petroleum Flood Project in Weyburn

**Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A PanCanadian petroleum flood project in Weyburn has provided the basis of a major monitoring project which is designed . . . or pardon me . . . a monitoring project on the reduction of greenhouse gases. The monitoring project is designed to evaluate the first four years of CO<sub>2</sub> injection at the enhanced recovery stage of oil.

To date this project has Canadian, industrial, European funding, and growing international interest. It is estimated that the CO<sub>2</sub> project will result in an additional 120 million barrels of oil recovered, creating an estimated 3,000 additional person-years of employment and an estimated hundred million of additional royalty tax revenue for the province.

Our obligation to rural Saskatchewan is strong, and with projects like this one we will remain on the road to success, Mr. Speaker.

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

### ORAL QUESTIONS

#### Maintenance of Highways

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Highways.

Madam Minister, I was pleased to read in the Throne Speech that the government will speed up the twinning of Highway No. 1 West, the result of an emergency motion which I introduced in this legislature last spring. And I was also pleased to see the government promised to rebuild rural highways and to improve primary and regional road systems to handle heavy traffic.

Mr. Speaker, I am anxious to see that budget and what kind of dollars the government will be allocating to make this all happen.

I would like to ask about reference in the Throne Speech to the Highways and Transportation amendment Act and a broader truck route management strategy. Madam Minister, what is this strategy and what are your plans for its implementation?

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, we were extremely pleased to receive the news release of the Canadian Auto Association complimenting us on the accelerated twinning of the No. 1.

And I can assure the member opposite that Friday will come in due course. The Minister of Finance will stand up and deliver the best news Saskatchewan people have heard in a long time when it comes to our highways and transportation system.

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

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that the members will have absolutely nothing to complain about on Friday, Mr. Speaker. Because on Friday we're going to announce that we're going to fix the highways in the province of Saskatchewan; and we're hopeful, Mr. Speaker, we're hopeful that instead of complaining about potholes, we're hoping that the opposition will be complaining about all the road construction that'll take place this spring and summer.

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

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are highways in the province which have been recently limited to an 8-tonne requirement by the Department of Highways, and farmers and businessmen who rely on trucking to move their products are affected by these restrictions as they have to find alternate routes. That costs them time and money.

Now there's much talk out in rural communities about Highways department's plans to download alternate road building and maintenance costs onto the RM (rural municipality) with the development of truck routes, gravel-truck routes, that will run parallel to existing paved highways.

Is that the real plan, Madam Minister? Instead of fixing the

main paved road, the NDP (New Democratic Party) government was going to build another gravel road parallel to the paved road just for heavy vehicles?

Madam Minister, is your department threatening RMs with gravel reversion of highways if they don't go along with your alternate truck route plan?

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

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member will know that we have thousands of kilometres of thin membrane surface highways in the province of Saskatchewan. Those roads were never built for the kind of heavy traffic that we're seeing on our primary and secondary roads in the province of Saskatchewan as a result of deregulation and rail line abandonment in this province, Mr. Speaker.

What we want to do is maintain as many dust-free surfaces in the province and we have entered into partnerships with rural municipalities for alternative truck routes. These are agreements — partnerships — with rural municipalities. And, Mr. Speaker, we're helping to pay for those municipal roads.

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

#### Alternative Trucking Route Proposal

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question's for the Minister of Highways.

There are a number of businesses in the Vanguard-Gravelbourg area who are very upset about plans by the Department of Highways to build an alternate truck route running parallel to Highway 43. They understand the alternate route would be gravel while Highway 43 would remain a thin membrane surface with an 8-tonne maximum weight restriction.

These businesses feel that it is not an acceptable solution to the problems with Highway 43. A gravel road is not an all-weather surface, meaning these businesses would not be able to haul during wet weather without damage to the road.

On one hand you are going to have existing Highway 43, a thin membrane paved road already in really rough shape, and running beside it, you will have a grid road that businesses and farmers don't want to use and can't use in bad weather.

Madam Minister, how do you explain to Saskatchewan people that this is efficient use of taxpayers' dollars?

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

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How I explain it, Mr. Speaker, is that we have seen a tremendous increase in the volume of truck traffic in the province of Saskatchewan, by over 900 per cent, as a result of the changes that have taken place with rail-line abandonment and deregulation.

Now our province does not have the fiscal capacity to repair all 8,000 kilometres of thin membrane surface. Now, Mr. Speaker, what we do have the capacity to do, is to keep as many of those

thin membrane surfaces as dust free as possible so that light traffic, school buses, and ambulances can get over those surfaces, Mr. Speaker.

We are entered into partnerships with rural municipalities. We are cost sharing those partnerships, and the municipalities are given the permission to allow heavier traffic onto those roads if the farm property or the business property abuts those roads, Mr. Speaker.

I think that's responsible government.

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

**Mr. Stewart:** — Also to the Minister of Highways, Mr. Speaker, Trailtech Industries of Gravelbourg is one such industry that employees 80 to 100 in the town of Gravelbourg that finds your alternate gravel idea unacceptable. Trailtech is a manufacturer of trailers. They have to haul their new trailers to markets down Highway 43 but would exceed the weight restrictions under the new plan. They couldn't use the new gravel truck route either because gravel causes damage to the brand new trailers.

Because sections of Highway 43 have already been turned to gravel, Trailtech has been choosing to take a longer alternate route around by Moose Jaw to hit Highway 1, adding considerable transportation expense.

Madam Minister, this idea is not meeting favour with area residents and businesses. Will you go back to the drawing board and come up with a better solution?

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

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — What I have said, is that trucks with gross weights of over 8,000 kilograms will be directed to use alternative routes. But, Mr. Speaker, RMs will be given the right to issue permits to those businesses and farms that abut the Highway 43, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we are trying to save our thin membrane surfaces. We're going to be repairing Highway 43 this summer. We're going to add additional repairs to Highway 43 next year. And, Mr. Speaker, we're cost-sharing the alternate truck route with the RMs located in that area, Mr. Speaker.

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

**The Speaker:** — Just before the member puts his question, I would ask him once again to phrase his question, as well as his preamble, through the Chair.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this question also for the Minister of Highways. Mr. Speaker, whether you talk to the trucking industry, businesses who rely on trucking, or the farming community, you will hear that gravel roads and heavy loads don't mix.

Trailtech Industries sends 70 per cent of their production west. If their trucking costs are going to continue to increase dramatically because of this government's back-to-gravel plan, then they will just pick up and move closer to their main

market.

Bickner Trucking of Vanguard is another local company that finds this gravel truck route idea unreasonable as time, fuel costs, and vehicle depreciation will increase for them. Farmers will see a substantial increase in transportation costs.

Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister, is building gravel truck routes, downloading road responsibilities onto the RMs, and forcing businesses to leave rural Saskatchewan your idea of rural revitalization?

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

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — You know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition is the opposition of doom and gloom and negativity and sour grapes and as . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . a bunch of . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order.

**Hon. Ms. Atkinson:** — Mr. Speaker, we know that Highway 43 takes a lot of oil down that road as well as a lot of gravel, plus there's a lot of grain traffic on that road, Mr. Speaker.

Rural residents have told us that they would like to have dust-free surfaces in their . . . in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We know that we've seen a 900 per cent increase in the volume of truck traffic as a result of rail-line abandonment, Mr. Speaker, and we're trying to address that. We will see a historic amount of money announced in Friday's budget to fix the highways in this province, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to be fixing the highways in this province, Mr. Speaker. We're going to have so much construction that people will be annoyed because of all of the construction. But, Mr. Speaker, we're hoping that they're not going to be annoyed about all the potholes.

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

(14:00)

### SaskPower Rates

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister Responsible for SaskPower.

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of confusion in the wake of the rate review panel's announcement last Friday, as regards the impact of their recommendations on the average Saskatchewan family. SaskPower officials, however, are reported to be saying that the recommended residential increase for Saskatchewan families will be in the range of 5.3 to 6 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Minister, will you confirm these are the rate hikes you're considering? What residential rate hike will you be recommending to your cabinet colleagues?

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

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I do want, again, to take the opportunity to thank the rate review panel for the good work that they've done.

And I want to again remind the members opposite and the public of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that SaskPower has had their rates frozen since 1996, Mr. Speaker. That's five years. I don't know what other private utility, Mr. Speaker, has had rates frozen for five years.

You can look across the border, Mr. Speaker, into Alberta where there's . . . they've seen rate increases in the energy sector of up to 250 per cent, Mr. Speaker — 250 per cent. And you can look into the United States and to California, Mr. Speaker, where rates have been there and they've not been able to provide a supply of power, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we will be making recommendations to the cabinet and cabinet will making a decision as it pertains to the rate review panel's recommendations shortly.

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

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, it was a simple question. The question was: is this minister proposing to his cabinet colleagues an increase to residential customers in the province of Saskatchewan of 5.3 to 6 per cent?

But, Mr. Speaker, later this afternoon we understand the minister will be announcing his plan for a SaskPower rebate. We understand that he plans to announce a one-time \$25 rebate to SaskTel customers, Mr. Speaker, to go along with the \$25 per person SaskEnergy rebate — from a government, Mr. Speaker, that has taken hundreds of millions of dollars in windfall energy profits over the last number of months.

Mr. Minister, this isn't going to provide much relief to Saskatchewan families. But will you at least take the Saskatchewan Party's advice and provide this rebate directly to SaskPower customers on SaskPower bills? Will you make that commitment today, Mr. Minister?

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

**Hon. Mr. Sonntag:** — First of all, Mr. Speaker, if the member doesn't understand, the recommendation comes from the independent rate review panel, not from myself. So the cabinet will make a decision based on the independent panel's recommendation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote, if I could though, from the *Gazette-Post-News*, Carnduff, of Monday, March 19, 2001 in which — and I quote from the Leader of the Opposition — Hermanson said, he said:

We want to make sure that these companies (referring to the Crown corporations) continue to flourish and be a significant part of Saskatchewan's economy.

Mr. Speaker, I say, Mr. Speaker, in light of that statement from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, is it not reasonable, Mr. Speaker, that SaskPower and our utilities should be allowed to compete here in Saskatchewan at rates that are reasonably . . . that are reasonable compared to almost any other jurisdiction in

the world, Mr. Speaker?

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

### Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority

**Ms. Eagles:** — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Liquor and Gaming. Mr. Speaker, last year the Provincial Auditor uncovered \$1.7 million in gaming revenue that had been improperly misspent by SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority). At a news conference in November, the minister admitted that the total figure may come to even more than 1.7 million once all the examination of past years is complete.

Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister, have you completed this examination and what is the total amount of gaming revenue that was misspent by SIGA?

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite would point out, the auditor in his November 15 report of 2000 suggested a number of actions that would be taken to fundamentally look at providing open, accountable, and transparent measures within the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority.

Many actions have been taken and we know that progress is good. And, as she would know, we have now SIGA that has the Provincial Auditor as their auditor of record. SIGA will publish an annual report which includes the financial statements and the payee lists.

Liquor and Gaming Authority, in conjunction with the Provincial Auditor and SIGA — now with a new board makeup and a new acting chief executive officer in place — are looking at every receipt possible to be able to bring forward the financial reports shortly, Mr. Speaker, and to show exactly what the amount that they would be owing to the province of Saskatchewan will be.

Thank you.

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

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at that same news conference last November the minister vowed to recover all the money that was misspent by SIGA.

Madam Minister, what steps have you taken to recover this money and how much has been recovered to date?

**The Speaker:** — Order. Before you answer the question, I would once again ask the members when they are putting their questions to put it through the Chair.

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite would know, many measures have been put in place. Compliance on all of the directives that the Provincial Auditor gave to us have been worked on and are being put in place by a new SIGA Board that is now meeting and is doing very well and having good progress on these

issues.

The amount that was mentioned, as we said, was an interim amount and that we would have to, in detail, with the auditors, with SIGA, look at every receipt and every amount payable to the provincial government. It would be made to us. No money would be out of pocket from the taxpayers of this province, Mr. Speaker.

To date, we are now taking that money off the instalments that are due to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations through the FNF (First Nations Fund) Fund, Mr. Speaker. And we will, over that time and once we know the complete picture, recover the entire amount, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at that same news conference in November, the minister said if necessary she would withhold the FSIN's (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) share of gaming profits until the money was all repaid.

Mr. Speaker, Madam Minister, the questions are simple: how much money have you recovered and how much money have you withheld from the FSIN?

**The Speaker:** — Just before we go . . . proceed members, I have asked repeatedly that you address the Chair in questions. One of the . . . I think it might be helpful if I explain to members that if you ask the Chair the question, as opposed to asking somebody on the side opposite the question, or referring to somebody on the side opposite the question, that would be helpful to the debate.

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, since the November reporting, much, much work has been done: compliance on all the issues the auditor presented, the new board in place, and an amount that she indicates was then established as the amount owing.

Until we could go through the detailed analysis that is now underway and very soon will be completed, the amount that will be put back through the withholding of the moneys that are owed to the FNF Fund will be, Mr. Speaker, the complete amount owing, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Ms. Eagles:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the casino operating agreement between the government and SIGA runs out at the end of this month, Mr. Speaker. Yet it seems the government has made very little progress in recovering the \$1.7 million in misspending that the auditor uncovered last year.

Mr. Speaker, when are you going to recover this money and what is the current status of the government's contract with SIGA to operate four casinos in this province?

**The Speaker:** — Thank you very much for the attempt. I think all you had to do was change one pronoun now, from you to she, and we will have it perfect.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Mr. Speaker, I may be missing something on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, but it seems when you ask a question and you get the answer, you should change the subsequent questions to reflect the answer that's been given to you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer is the full amount is recoverable, Mr. Speaker. We are taking from the quarterly payments to First Nations the amount owing, Mr. Speaker.

But I would point out, Mr. Speaker, she is totally neglecting to mention all of the work that's been done since November 15, that indicates that good progress is being made: acceptance and implementation of the new board structure, with the seven member board, its three members from Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming nominees and four from the FSIN; training and orientation programs for the board; acceptance and implementation of all of the auditor's reports, our auditor is the auditor of record for SIGA. And the list goes on, Mr. Speaker.

I'm telling them . . .

**The Speaker:** — The member's time's elapsed.

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

#### Recruitment Of Nurses

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Minister, on Friday you confirmed what most people in Saskatchewan already know — that when it comes to health care, the NDP talks big and then delivers nothing.

In the 1999 election platform, the NDP promised to hire 500 new nurses. But when we asked the minister last Friday how many more nurses were practising since the election, he didn't have a clue.

Mr. Minister, you've had the weekend to think about it, your department has time to inform you. Can you tell us how many more nurses are practising in Saskatchewan today than in 1999?

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

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I think last week they were having a little bit of trouble with the lemons. I think this week it's the chokecherries.

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

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — In 1999 in September we had an election campaign where we said we are going to find more health providers for our system. That's just over about a year and a half ago. And we're only into our four-year term, or five-year term a year and a half. We're continuing to work on that particular promise.

What we are talking about is health providers in the whole system. We have done many things related to nurses. We're looking at all of the various technical jobs. We've recruited

more doctors. We're working with the communities, with the professions, with all of the people so that we can continue to build on the best system in Canada.

And what we are doing is not being helped by . . .

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

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on a CBC radio interview on the weekend you said, and I quote:

I'm not sure if we have full details on the numbers. What we do know is that there are more nurses that are registered with the SRNA.

Mr. Speaker, the answer is not that there's zero new nurses practising in Saskatchewan. According to statistics from the SRNA's (Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association) annual report, there's actually 48 fewer nurses practising here right now.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the minister is spending too much of his time coming up with very sick little one-liners, and instead should be concentrating on the statistics that his department should know.

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

**Mr. Gantefoer:** — Mr. Minister, instead of the little citrus fruit jokes that you've been kind of practising all summer, why don't you come up with a real plan for how you're going to meet the needs of Saskatchewan health care and the nurses who are overworked?

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

**Hon. Mr. Nilson:** — Mr. Speaker, I was going to talk about quince, but I'm not sure they understand what that is.

But what I'm going to say today is that in 1999 those members opposite came forward with an election platform that said, no increase in health spending other than the rate of inflation.

If we had stuck with that amount, we would not be anywhere near where we are with the revenues that we have which apply to the health system. And so I want the public of Saskatchewan to realize what kinds of promises those people made. We do not want them anywhere near this side of the House and we will make sure that that never happens.

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

(14:15)

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

##### Bill No. 202 — The Holocaust Memorial Day Act

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

I move that a Bill to recognize *Yom haShoah* as Holocaust Memorial Day in Saskatchewan be now introduced and read a first time.



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

### STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

#### Question of Privilege

**The Speaker:** — Before orders of the day, members, yesterday there was a question of privilege which was brought to the House — on Friday, the day last, there was a question of privilege presented to the House.

I have been doing some careful consideration of the question and it is my intent to bring down a ruling sometime before 5 o'clock this afternoon.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### SPECIAL ORDER

#### ADJOURNED DEBATES

#### ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Jones, seconded by Mr. McCall, and the proposed amendment moved by Mr. Hermanson.

**Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of items that I would like to attend to before I move further into the Throne Speech, and I do want to just backtrack slightly as well to remind members of where we were headed.

First of all I want to say that we very often . . . we congratulate our own members and we thank them for their work. But every morning when I come to this Legislative Building I am welcomed by the people at the door, and I think all members in the Assembly are welcomed, very kindly and thoughtfully by the staff who are at the door. And I want to thank them for their bright faces and the way they light up the day and start our days as we move in here.

Mr. Speaker, there was an item around the use of Internet that was discussed the other day. And one of the things that I'm really happy about in our Throne Speech and the direction that we're going is trying to make more access to the Internet. Mr. Speaker, one of the members opposite in one of our recent debates was panning and mocking out the whole issue of the Internet and talking about coming up, jolt upright in bed, and being astounded by the fact that maybe there was going to be Internet service while his farm was going bankrupt.

While the mocking out was kind of fun, and I'm sure it was done playfully. But, Mr. Speaker, I think I'm a little concerned about that member from Kindersley. And I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, if he has read his own document from the Sask Party annual meeting where the constituency of Kindersley put in a resolution to their party that a Saskatchewan Party government would implement policies to encourage the local processing of commodities and direct Internet marketing of agriculture products. That was carried, Mr. Speaker, at their own convention, and the minister from Kindersley should be aware of that. I suspect one of these days he's going to come bolt

upright in his bed and think, oh my goodness, maybe the leader was thinking about Kindersley when he was talking about quality candidates needed.

Mr. Speaker, what century is he living in? We need Internet service to give quality marketing ability to our rural province, to our rural constituents. And, Mr. Speaker, our government will make sure that that access is available.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing that I had just started into were the developments in Northern Saskatchewan. Some tremendous developments there in terms of forestry, in terms of industry. Some very exciting support in terms of partnerships with First Nations and Metis people. And our government is going to continue to work on that whole area and try and build up the province in this manner.

There is a tremendous future for this province, Mr. Speaker, and I think we catch a glimpse of that in this Throne Speech. And I'm sure that even members opposite would see that if they would give up their deep and abiding envy for everything Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's the SP's (Saskatchewan Party) job to oppose, but I must say that the high level of negativity that I keep hearing from the members opposite when they speak about Saskatchewan, appalls me.

The member from Lloydminster speculated the other day that maybe he made the wrong decision in moving back to Saskatchewan. Maybe he did. Maybe his negativity and his lack of vision won't allow him to work with the powerful, life-giving spirit of Saskatchewan. Maybe he just can't see the possibilities. Maybe the bright, deregulated, and very, very expensive lights of Alberta have blinded him to the beauty and the possibility of Saskatchewan. Or maybe he's just stuck in the negative, gloom and doom mentality of his party, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A few years back, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read a book by . . . a series of books by C. S. Lewis, called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the final book of the series entitled *The Last Battle*, the end of the book, some of the people are looking around and all they can see is dirt and manure and darkness. But there are other people in exactly the same location, who see flowers, blue skies, beauty, and other people around them.

Mr. Speaker, I think this story illustrates the difference in viewpoints. The members on this side of the House look at Saskatchewan and we see possibility. We see a future that is bright for all of the people of this province.

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

**Mr. Wartman:** — Mr. Speaker, we listen to the people on the other side of the House and what we hear is negativity, we hear gloom and doom most of the time. No hope, no possibility, only Alberta. It's hard to believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now I've got to say there are exceptions. And I'm very thankful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for one of the exceptions we got the other day because I like when we hear critical concerns raised.

And I have to say the member from Indian Head-Milestone had a couple of very good criticisms in his speech the other day. They were constructive; they were around some of our farm support programs. And I think those constructive criticisms can be taken into account by our minister when he's working with the department to try and develop good programs.

Now it was a little confusing for some of us on this side who care about rural Saskatchewan, but aren't experts in the field. And I think the thing that threw me most was the real fast switches between bushels and dollars that was happening over there. And I'm sure that if more people could convert bushels into dollars the way the member did, they'd be very happy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this side of the House we see a bright and prosperous future for this province. The programs that are beginning to be outlined, that we're catching a glimpse of in the Throne Speech show that we are living toward a vision of hope and possibility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I support the unamended Throne Speech. I am convinced that, moved by the spirit of Saskatchewan, working together with the committed people of this province, the people who love this province, we will be successful in building a wonderful and prosperous future for all the people of our beloved province.

And so, therefore, I speak in favour of the Throne Speech, unamended. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First off, there's a couple of things I'd like to do. Is my speaker working? I just wonder because I notice I still don't have a nameplate, and it's been nine months today since I was elected. Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . well I was suggesting if it was a cost overrun I would chip in on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first order of business is I would like to congratulate the Speaker on his election to the Chair, and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your election as Deputy Speaker.

I'm very pleased today to rise and speak and enter the debate on the Speech from the Throne. But as this is my first opportunity to rise and speak in favour of Wood River and in favour of Saskatchewan, I figure I should talk a little bit about how and where I got here.

Mr. Speaker, I finished high school in 1961. And if you think back to those days, there was no jobs. It's kind of reminiscent of today under an NDP socialist government. So I also had to leave this province to find a job. And I joined the military.

Mr. Speaker, when I first joined the military it was a job; that's what I needed is work. But then I got involved in it and it became a career. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I went through my career in the military, I became a fighter pilot — and for those that don't understand that, it's one that flies fighter aircraft.

And part of my duties, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a fighter pilot was I was part of a defensive structure in the free world to

defend against the spread of communism. Now isn't that ironic, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Here we spend millions of dollars — billions worldwide — put lives on the line to stop and arrest the spread of communism, and lo and behold, here in Saskatchewan we vote in a party that has the same ideologies. It just doesn't make sense to me.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my grandparents homesteaded in southern Saskatchewan, circa the 1912 time frame. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they arrived then, there was no roads, no railroads, no schools, no hospitals. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 82 years later I retired back to that same area, within 10 miles, and guess what? The railroad is pulled, the roads are in a shambles, the hospital is closed, and the school is closed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's progress under a socialist system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I get often asked why I entered politics. Well part of it is just what I have talked about. But another relates back to what I suggested about in the defence of the spread of an ideology. And we have an ideology that government as a whole should own and control the means of production, distribution, and exchange of product. I totally disagree with that. An economy controlled by the government rather than business, I totally disagree with.

I read a comment . . . I read an article in the paper with the leadership campaign for the Leader of the NDP race and the quote went something like, "We need to grasp back the economy from business and put it back in the hands of government." Mr. Speaker, I totally, totally disagree with that philosophy.

All we have to do is look at the record of the government handling business. Does NST (NST Network Services of Chicago) ring a bell? Guyana? Channel Lake? Spudco (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company)? That's the record of this government being in business.

(14:30)

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's appalling to me when we look at members opposite that wish to invest outside of the province. It strikes me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that here we have a socialist government that doesn't even want to invest in a socialist province.

Another thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am very much against, is when we start losing freedoms. And when I say we lose freedoms — forced union membership and monopolies they take away a basic right of freedom.

Some years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was a report commissioned by the NDP government or NDP-CCF (New Democratic Party-Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) of the day called the Stabler report. It was a paper on the urbanization of rural Saskatchewan, and today I believe that that has been used as a manifesto for members opposite.

To me it's very scary. Because in this you look at the will to socialize, centralize, urbanize, and demoralize. If you look at the acronym for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's SCUD. And we're all, we're all familiar from the, from the Middle East war the infamous missile the Scud. And not unlike the missile, this

government is going with no guidance and it's an irritant but not a real threat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all agree — everyone of us agree — the number one resource that we have in this province and in fact any province is people. Why are we chasing them out?

Roughly in the late '20s we had 1 million people in this province, and today we have, basically, exactly the same. Zero progress, and basically we're chasing people out.

I'll give you an example of how and why this . . . not why it's done, but how it's done. Some of my colleagues have heard me use this phrase, this explanation before. We in Saskatchewan raise 1.5 million head of feeder cattle, and you raise them to the point where they're shipped off to feedlots for finishing. And we ship out 750,000 out of this province. You have to ask yourself why.

Now along with shipping out the cattle from this province, guess what? We ship out the grain to feed the cattle also outside of the province. Now not only that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but who follows the loads of grain outside the province is our young men and women to go someplace else to feed those cattle the Saskatchewan grain outside of our province. It just doesn't make sense to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now I don't know, I really don't know, who members opposite can blame that on. We hear the blame on anything and everything, and that's one I'm not sure where they can lay the blame.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about my constituency of Wood River. There's an awful lot of history down in that Wood River area. A lot of natural beauty and unlimited potential if we had the right direction.

The area of Wood Mountain was home to Sitting Bull and his treks north to Canada, also over to Willow Bunch — steeped in history. The Wood Mountain Rodeo is the longest continuous rodeo in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It started in 1890 and is still going strong today. We have a number of fascinating items in the constituency — the petroglyphs at St. Victor, the Grasslands Park, the Frenchman River Valley. We have a diverse area from the oil fields of Shaunavon to the coalfields of Coronach. The topography is rolling and it's got a lot of natural beauty. We just have to look at doing something with it and not use the SCUD principle as I talked about earlier.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, tourism is a huge part of the economy of this province or could be a huge part of the economy.

In the '50s — and I won't give you an exact date — but the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Fir Mountain in those days, he got up in the House and he spoke about tourism south of where my home is at Fir Mountain, and it's a hill that's actually sinking into the ground — thus called the sinking hill. He announced it in the House and said this is one of the greatest tourist possibilities that we have in southern Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to this day I can use the exact same words because nothing has been done — zero. Here we have a lot of potential and no will to do anything.

What's one of the biggest impediments to this? Highways. No infrastructure to get to some of these wonderful sights.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talked of tourism the other day and how it's not just the people that are coming to these sites and going back . . . are not going to come back, but they're going home, and they're telling their friends, and telling their friends, and we're losing just a tremendous amount of tourism potential just because one person's had a bad experience.

Highway 18. And we've heard an awful lot about Highway 18 last year, but I personally have witnessed vehicles coming from the south and hitting Highway 18 — people with new motorhomes, fifth wheels — and they hit Highway 18, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they turn around and go home. Now these are not the only people that we're missing out on; it's all of their friends, relatives, and to whomever they speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can attest to how bad Highway 18 was. I, over two elections, had the opportunity to travel that road quite extensively. We have heard some rhetoric about it but I'm here to tell you that a lot of it is true. One day I was driving and I personally witnessed four ducks swimming in a pothole on Highway 18.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the embellishment that came out was from one of my NDP cohorts in the area. He says yes, but when you drove there they flew away, they didn't dive. And that is true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had the opportunity last session to spend a couple of days in the House, and I did bring up the fact that it was more good news for the NDP government. The good people of Val Marie, Bracken, Orkney, and Climax fixed the road for the government. And they did one heck of a good job, I might add.

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

**Mr. Huyghebaert:** — Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's always some sad stories with the highways. We talk about the four lane, and twinning the four lane, and I applaud that. But one of the very sad stories from my hometown is a lady that was killed as a direct result of the road. And it was the only daughter of Ken and Roberta Fraser. And it was a water-filled pothole in the road, and she hit it, lost control of the vehicle, and was fatally injured.

That's a very sad situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaking about our roads.

Another example that I use is right at my hometown, and it was two people from Las Vegas just out on a tour. And they hit a pothole and ripped something out on the bottom of their car, and their car was a little Saturn. And when the individual stopped to give him a hand — which is very common in rural Saskatchewan; you always stop and help somebody out — the first thing that they said, the very first thing was, where can I find a Saturn dealer and where can I get on a good road? Well both of them turned out to be in Medicine Hat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I very much applaud the money that's going into highways that's been announced, and we'll see just how much on Friday in the budget, I guess. But what's very important to me is where the rubber meets the road — how

much is going to go to the surface of the roads? Not for administration, not regurgitating the money system back and forth and playing games with the dollars — how much is where the rubber meets the road? And that's what I'm waiting to see in the budget on Friday.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this concept of the dual roads, the heavy-haul road — we spoke about it in question period — I find it, I find it just amazing; we don't have money for so many things but we can build a parallel road.

Now there's two things that I personally see that comes from this, is, is it a plan to off-load that onto the RMs? Is it a total off-loading scheme? Or — or — is it a plan to give the residents of rural Saskatchewan a choice of what road they want to drive on with the potholes? That I'm not sure yet.

Mr. Speaker, I, like my colleagues on this side and probably all colleagues in the House, spend a lot of time in my constituency listening to people. And I think that's one thing that we on this side of the House have a very strong propensity for, is listening to our people and listening to their views.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, agriculture, again, is one of the biggest issues in my constituency. We all have stories about AIDA (Agriculture Income Disaster Assistance) and I just have to give you a couple of my views on it, or what happened in our constituency.

There's a lot of cheques that have been received, and two weeks or three weeks later is another letter saying, pay back your money. Not only that, pay interest on the money that we gave you. I suggested in consultation with one of my constituents, he should write back and say, if you want the money back, you can get it from the bank, you can get it from the oil company, you can get it from the seed dealer, you can get it from the fertilizer dealer. Because that's where the money.

So maybe it should be the AIDA people in Winnipeg or Ottawa getting it back from these companies rather than from the individual farmer.

But how foolish some of the aspects of AIDA are. One of my constituents had a question from the AIDA office and said, you have an error in your AIDA form. Said, why? He said, well on page 3 you said you sold no. 3 wheat, but on page 1 you said you put no. 1 into the ground. That's not possible. That's how much the people in AIDA offices know about agriculture.

And another one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I thought was extremely odd was one AIDA form was held up because the individual did not include death certificates for his calves that he had lost in the spring.

And what do we have in the Throne Speech to help out this issue? We have the cover crop program, the CCP (Conservation Cover Program). I think we should have called it the corporate cover crop program, because we saw a lot of hockey sweaters in the past with that on, which is CCCP.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had the opportunity this weekend to talk with an awful lot of my constituents about the cover crop program. And for the benefit of members opposite, I would like

to give them just a few of the comments I received from my constituents. These are not my words; these are from my constituents, who actually are farmers and ranchers.

A farce, a joke, a slap in the face. One said that absolutely nothing would have been better than that. Who was it done for? Was it done for the urban people to make voters in urban areas make the government look like they're doing something for rural Saskatchewan? Tokenism, in other words.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had one person, one person that I spoke to said, it all helps. And I agree with him. It all helps. But he also said, I can't even call it a step in the right direction. He said it's not big enough to be a step in the right direction. He said it's a lean in the right direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think that's what we should have . . . members opposite should be doing more of, is leaning in the right direction.

(14:45)

It's no wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why rural Saskatchewan feels abandoned by the federal and provincial governments. Here we have — and we just heard it just recently again — Highspeed Internet. The buzzword out there now, Mr. Speaker, is, no money for seed but money for speed.

Mr. Speaker, I have to put it in perspective, relate it back to my flying days. What the CCP program does for farmers, I'm going to equate it with, Mr. Deputy Speaker, flying over the North Atlantic in a fighter aircraft, two-seat if somebody wants to come with me. And you're across the North Atlantic, icebergs below you — certain death if you have to eject out of the airplane or if you crash. And for some reason you have a fuel leak. Now you are in trouble, not unlike our farmers. So you're going along and your options are down to nothing.

Now, out of nowhere comes a saviour, and in my case in the airplane, the saviour says, we're going to give you gas. And so you've got some hope. Fuel gauge is going down, certain death, but you've got hope. All of a sudden in comes a saviour and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my airplane he gives me five gallons of gas. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, certain death is there but 40 miles down the road.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what do we get out of members opposite? We debated it last week. And what did I hear: we're going to send a strongly worded letter to the Prime Minister of Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, can't you just see this? I have a visual of this. The Prime Minister of Canada just shaking in his boots because he received a strongly worded letter from the Premier of Saskatchewan. I'm sure he'll run over to his Finance minister and his Ag minister and say, give them what they want because I am so afraid of this letter.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, another big concern in my constituency, and we hear about it on a daily basis in the media and throughout the province, is health. Once the hospitals were closed in rural Saskatchewan — 52 — but in my area there was a number closed. And it doesn't seem correct to me. Here we've closed hospitals; we all agree we have an aging population, and yet we're closing senior care homes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'll be speaking more about it later this week because I have a meeting Wednesday night, but the Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia is slated to be closed. And we're closing beds and yet we have an aging population.

The people I met with the other day said, what are we supposed to do with our family that's in there, our loved ones? The answer is: you farm them out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think most of us when kids played 52 pickup with a deck of cards. That's what we're now doing with our seniors. You go zap with a deck of cards, and wherever it falls that's where you send your loved one. I totally disagree with that philosophy and I totally disagree with that policy. And we'll be talking more about the Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia later.

CCCP. Scud policy.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the EMS report. Here's something that I just can't comprehend. The citizens of Val Marie, a number of years ago, started an ambulance service because they had nothing. And an individual that was the strong backer of the ambulance — he was one that was injured down in the hills, had to be loaded into a back of a car and drove to Swift Current — so he was the backer of starting an ambulance.

So the community bought an ambulance, funded the ambulance, funded the drivers. The support they get from the provincial government is a pittance in the aid of communications. And guess what the EMS report recommends? That they take this away. I don't know how anybody could stand up and support that taking away a facility that was bought, paid for, and run by the local community. But that's what's in the report, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We talk about, we talk about waiting lists. And there's games played with waiting lists, there's no doubt about it. But until you have to deal with a person that's been on a waiting list for two years, it's just rhetoric. But when you deal with it, that if somebody's been waiting two years, it's very difficult to comprehend in this day and age, in this province for somebody would have to wait that long.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's something that's a bit of a mystery to me. We have facilities for some of our senior citizens in my constituency whereby if you make a certain amount of money, you pay a certain level of fee in the facility; if you don't make as much money, you pay another level. Now I think there's a name for that, Mr. Speaker, and I just can't figure out what that name is.

And also, also, we have people from my constituency that are going to North Dakota for MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging) because they can afford it. We have people going to Rochester because they can afford it. Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think there's a name for that also. If you can afford, you can go; if you can't afford, you stay. I think it's a number called two-tier system.

We've been living in this two-tiered system for a number of years, trying to be masked and hid over by members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another one of the concerns in my constituency — and it's a very strong and very real concern — is cell coverage. And I had an opportunity to write to the minister requesting a review of cell coverage in the Wood River area. The answer I get: it's a business decision made by SaskTel.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I already suggested to you what the business dealings of this government are like. I don't think we want to go there.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the more we depopulize rural Saskatchewan, the more need there is for good telephone coverage, and telephone coverage being cell coverage. We take away all of the facilities, we take away infrastructure, now we have no way of communicating. And I think that's absolutely deplorable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look at the potential in Wood River, and there is some. The power plant at Coronach. They estimate they've got a 200 years supply of coal for generating power. What do we do here? We tinker with buying it from Wyoming. Even the supporters of that side of the House had to not support any longer after they started hauling in coal which was taking jobs away from Saskatchewan people right down in the south part of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there's a demand for power all over North America. There's a demand for power in Saskatchewan. I understand that we on occasion buy power. And yet we have the capability, we have everything in place to provide all the power that this province would need. And what do we do? We invest out of province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaking of power, the minister said Friday — and he did say again today — that power rates have been frozen since 1996. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would hope that he talks to the person that's billing my power because I can assure you that my power bill has not been frozen since 1996. It has gone up substantially.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another bright spot that we have within our constituency. I talked about the cattle leaving the province. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few entrepreneurial individuals got together and started Red Coat Feeders, which I'm very happy to say officially opened about two months ago in Hazenmore, Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was done in spite of government. And I would like to suggest to everyone in this House that the biggest problem they had with the Red Coat Feeders all came from government agencies — not the money — government agencies.

And I have one that again baffles me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the feedlot is on a north-facing slope, at a fairly decent angle on a north-facing slope, and part of the criteria from SERM is it has to be bermed. So the three sides were bermed and the expert come out and said, no I'm sorry, it's not finished because the south side has to be bermed. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know, maybe I'm missing something but I don't know when water started rolling uphill.

In other words, there's no common sense used in any of the planning in any of the government departments — absolutely no common sense — and that is an impediment to expanding any industry in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Throne Speech does absolutely nothing for the constituency of Wood River. The Throne Speech indicated policies would create a vision for Saskatchewan. I suggest the vision is in the rear-view mirror.

But don't worry rural Saskatchewan, because we're going to get on a bus and come out and save you. It reminds me of the country and western song "Get on the Bus and Forget About Us."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear members opposite saying to us, you guys are nothing but doom and gloom over there. Well, is it any wonder. There's lots of negativity; there's lots of negativity out where I live, and rightfully so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the constituents of Wood River do view this province with hope. They view it with the hope that we will become government and change some of these idiotic policies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the Speech from the Throne, but I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just want to first of all take this opportunity on behalf of the constituents of Athabasca to commend the two folks that were elected this past summer. Of course, I'm talking about the Elphinstone and the Riversdale folks that elected two fine MLAs. And I want to congratulate them and to assure them that not only do we have a seasoned veteran but we have a young up-and-comer MLA that I'm sure is going to be a tremendous asset for many years to come — both of them, I hope — towards the coalition government movement at this stage of the game and certainly to the NDP in their future years.

I also want to congratulate the Speaker on his election. I think it knows no question that the Speaker has had a lot of experience in the Assembly and certainly is aware of all the rules and the regulations, and it does take a lot of time to get used to some of the demands of the job. But I want to assure him that he has my utmost respect and support, and I wish him very well in his new capacity.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that I listened with great interest to some of the comments made by the Wood River MLA, and there's no question that there are many fine people like him that have served their country in a number of capacities.

My father was also a veteran of World War II, and I have a number of people in my community that served in the Korean War. And they also had a member who passed away a number of years ago that served in the First World War as well. And all three of those members in my community are very proud to be members of the NDP, and they have fought for freedom of this country. They have good ideas on how the country could be

built. But I'll say one thing, some of the things that we're doing as a government they're very, very proud of the accomplishments and they're very proud that they're Canadian as well.

But before I go on any further, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that this is a good government. And that's why I rise today to support the Speech from the Throne. And just to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, that I'm going through some clippings I just picked up from my desk here — and there's a fairly big whack of clippings here — and here's some pretty good indications of what the economy of Saskatchewan is doing.

(15:00)

And I'll just go on saying, and I quote from the March 23 *StarPhoenix* clippings: "Twine manufacturer sings praises of city during Minnesota trade mission." And that of course is talking about Saskatoon's business advantages. Good news, Mr. Speaker.

Another article here: "Aboriginal business course gets enthusiastic response." And that's a *StarPhoenix* article again, talking about the Aboriginal business people and the role that they play.

I also have a clipping here, Mr. Speaker, it says: "New funds earmarked to ensure water quality." And we'll speak a bit more of that later.

And it says here, Mr. Speaker, another news clipping: "Refinery to expand . . . \$255 million project."

And then it talks about another article here, Mr. Speaker: "Walkers seek an end to racism." Again that was from a couple days ago, Friday, March 23.

Tuesday, March 13, the *Grenfell Sun*, quote: "Twinning on Highway No. 1 East."

The *Grenfell Sun* of Tuesday, March 13: "Wolseley committee remains optimistic."

Then I go to *The Estevan Mercury*, Wednesday, March 14: "New on-line courses available."

And then I go to *Yorkton This Week* of Wednesday, March 14: "Strawboard plant one step closer to opening."

And then I go to *The Northern Pride* of March 13: "Meadow Lake housing market steady in 2000."

And then I go to *The Northern Pride* again, page 11, March 13: "Cash injection for fishing programs."

The *Kindersley Clarion* from March 12: "Unity feedlot investors hope for a spring construction start."

And then I go to *Yorkton This Week*, March 14: "Provincial agriculture ministers want more federal dollars."

And I go down to another article, one of March 23, 2001, Mr. Speaker. It says: "Former premier poised to head medicare

review.”

And once again, Mr. Speaker, our former leader and our former premier shows up on the national stage. And I wish that he accepts the job because he'll do a tremendous amount of good work and is a credit to the whole exercise of looking at the national health care challenges that we have.

And about the only bad news I found in my stack of clippings, Mr. Speaker, it says here, quote: “Alliance has double standard.”

And the reason why I say that, Mr. Speaker, is the Alliance Party, as we all know, has certainly practised some of the views and has some of the philosophy of the opposition, the Saskatchewan Party. And I know for a fact that there are several members really watching what happened during the Alliance leadership race.

And you can almost take the centre stage there, right down the centre there, and put that bunch with the Leader of the Opposition under Manning's camp, and take that bunch there, the member from Kindersley, under Day's camp.

And the power struggle, Mr. Speaker, the power struggle is very apparent here, Mr. Speaker, very apparent.

Unfortunately Mr. Manning lost. Well I should say his supporter lost on that side, and the real leader, the member from Kindersley, and Mr. Day, of course, won the day and that's where they went. So the problem, Mr. Speaker, with that is that they want to, on one hand, they want to capitalize on what they call the Alliance surge in the West, but at the same time people are asking, who are these guys? Who are the Saskatchewan Party? What do they stand for?

And every time they have a microphone in front of their mouth they say oh, tax cuts. That's it. How about health care; how about education; how about highways; how about northern Saskatchewan; how about the Aboriginal community? What plan have they got for agriculture? Mr. Speaker, they have nothing.

And my point, my point, Mr. Speaker, my point to the people of Saskatchewan. This opposition party right across the way here, nobody is showing any attention to their policies. And I suggest to you, today, Mr. Speaker, that once they do, that their little honeymoon they had last fall is going to be over pretty fast. It's going to be over pretty fast once they begin to see, once they begin to see, Mr. Speaker, not only the divisions, the divisions within that caucus — it's going to be very, very apparent; it's coming, it's coming — but secondly, Mr. Speaker, what's going to happen, is people are going to see the conflict that they have, the conflict they have over policy. They're going to see that.

So my big message today, clearly, to the people of Saskatchewan, I say to each and every one of you, is to check on those guys and see what they're about. See where they stand on medicare; see where they stand on agriculture; see where they stand on a number of issues, whether it's environment, whether it's education. The list goes on. See where they stand, and you will see . . . you take their plan, you take their numbers. And you can microwave those numbers; you can boil the

numbers; you can cook the numbers; you could fry them in the sun. Anyway you want to do it, their numbers just don't add up.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Because, Mr. Speaker, because, Mr. Speaker, they don't know how to govern. That's the problem; they don't know how to govern. And I say to every member of the Saskatchewan public, is check them out. Check them out and you will see, not only is there a division in those ranks, but there's also confusion as to what they stand.

When you put a microphone in front of their mouth they say oh, tax cuts. Well, Mr. Speaker, we don't talk about tax cuts; we deliver tax cuts.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — And that's the most important thing people are going to . . . are going to be watching over the next several months.

Now I listened with enthusiasm the other day when the Leader of the Opposition . . . talking about northern Saskatchewan. And he says and I quote right here, and I quote right here and he says, Mr. Speaker:

I was in Ile-a-la-Crosse and I saw the sign on his office. It was . . . big . . . guess what the colours were? The colours were red and white. Liberal red colours, sort of, you could tell that's what it was.

(And) You know . . . the address that was on this sign, Mr. Speaker? It was a sign from my office. It said room 265, Legislative Building. This minister hadn't been to his office to even change his sign since the days he was in the official opposition as a Liberal.

That's what the member, the Leader of the Opposition said. Well I say to you, sir, if you don't like that sign, that sign will be gone. And the most important thing, the most important thing if you talk about northern Saskatchewan . . . and I tell the people that are north, most certainly in this great hall of democracy you're allowed to express your opinion. You're elected to do so.

And most certainly I encourage him and all his constituents or all the people that are sitting across, his party, his team to visit the North more often. And perhaps, and perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, he would stop talking about signs and start talking about some of the progress that's being made in northern Saskatchewan whether it's forestry, whether it's mining, or whether it's tourism.

Now northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, northern Saskatchewan — they're a very proud people and you know they have optimism. They want things to happen. And you know over the years they've faced many challenges like overcrowded housing, poor highways, and these challenges were apparent for the last 20 years. We're finally doing something about it.

But I've always maintained, I've always maintained that they

certainly had the challenges in front of them. And then when I heard the Opposition Leader was going to go visit northern Saskatchewan my comment was my goodness, haven't my people suffered enough already.

You know clearly, clearly, Mr. Speaker, the travelling road show of the Saskatchewan Party, the doom-and-gloom show. You know I say to him that we have challenges in northern Saskatchewan. We're going to work together to work on those challenges but please don't come out there and depress people anymore. You know you're doing that enough in the province of Saskatchewan. We don't need that.

Where is your sense of vision for Saskatchewan? Where is your optimism? This is a beautiful province. Celebrate the success of Saskatchewan. Celebrate the success of the North and stop spreading doom and gloom.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I mentioned a year and a half ago in this very Assembly, I said there will be members in that back row — if not the front — but in that back row, that'll say, this is a good government. And that day is going to be coming.

They may be thinking that in the back of their mind, but right away, swat it out. Don't say that. Don't say that. But I know in their hearts and their minds that they're going to say that this is a good government; they're doing right. And just wait till the budget on Friday, Mr. Speaker. They're going to see a very comprehensive budget and a good budget.

And I say it again. And I say it again: Saskatchewan people, check out what those guys stand for. See the divisive ways that they're trying to break up Saskatchewan. Stop doing away with the . . . Stop promoting the doom-and-gloom show because not everybody's going to be depressed after you're done with them. But most important of all in my humble opinion, that I don't think they know how to govern, Mr. Speaker. They do not know how to govern.

Now I know one thing. This coalition government has a lot to be proud of, Mr. Speaker. This coalition government has got a lot of good values and they certainly have a common direction.

Now you look at the way, look at the history of Saskatchewan, and certainly the coalition government's in the past number of months that have been working together, we have had some success, Mr. Speaker. The largest income tax cut in the history of Saskatchewan — the largest. We have increased the budgets in health care, in highways. And, Mr. Speaker, we've also paid down debt. Mr. Speaker, we've paid down debt. And we've increased the number of people working last year in the province.

So my question is, my question is: where, Mr. Speaker, where is the logic of the people of Saskatchewan saying, okay, that's not a bad track record but let's go look at the Saskatchewan Party to see what they're about? And, Mr. Speaker, that attention is coming to the Saskatchewan Party. They'll come along and people will find out on their own what they're about.

Where do you stand on education? What's your position on the CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program)? Do you have a position? How about northern Saskatchewan? Where's your Aboriginal file? How do you divide . . . how do you heal the division that you've created between rural Saskatchewan and urban Saskatchewan?

And I submit to you today, Mr. Speaker, they do not have any answers. But you put a microphone in front of them. Oh tax cuts. Tax cuts. And I say to the people of Saskatchewan: the balanced approach that makes sense is being undertaken on this end and certainly from this side and not from that side.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in my humble opinion, coming back from northern Saskatchewan, I haven't had a lot of exposure to the agriculture sector. And I know I have a lot of farmer friends but that's about it. And when I come here and I listen and I'm sitting here, I'm totally neutral in terms of where we need to go with the agricultural file.

And you know what? I sit here and I try and listen to what they have to say on agriculture. And they should know agriculture. But the divisions and the lack of governing skills on that side really is a confused direction that they are trying to do, and they're not sure what they want to do when it comes to agriculture.

And I'll give you a couple of examples to all the people of Saskatchewan listening. You look at Stockwell Day. When he stops here at the airport, he doesn't come into the city, he stops at the airport. And what does he say, he basically says: farmers have enough, farmers have enough. Okay, well, if farmers have enough, why are you guys lining up with them? Why are you lining up with them?

And you look at . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . exactly, Kerpan wants to join the States. And you look at Manning — and a whole pile of people went from Saskatchewan to go see Manning in Ottawa — and Manning basically said no, there's no more subsidies.

And these guys are closely tied in with them. That's their federal party. So you took Stockwell Day and Preston Manning, two of the leaders of the Canadian Alliance, that's their heroes in Ottawa. And they come out here and they tell the farmers and they tell them there's no more money for you guys. The only ones defending the farmers are this coalition government, Mr. Speaker, not them.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Now I asked the question a number of times in this Assembly. Why is it that you guys across the way, you vote right but you spin left? Make up your mind. Do you want income tax cuts or do you want services for all of the people of Saskatchewan?

They are a confused lot, Mr. Speaker. They are trying to be everything to everybody. But I suggest to you that certainly the microscopes are going to come. They're going to examine where the Saskatchewan Party . . . and their honeymoon is over, Mr. Speaker — honeymoon is over.



And I point out as well, Mr. Speaker, I agree and I concur with the member from Thunder Creek and the Wood River MLA when he talked about half the calves dropped on the ground going to Alberta, when he talks about the feed for the calves being grown here and shipped to Alberta. Well the reason why they're doing that on a constant basis, Mr. Speaker, is there's nobody defending Saskatchewan and nobody on that side is promoting Saskatchewan. The only people promoting Saskatchewan — on this side.

My plea to the official opposition is stop your doom and gloom. Be proud of the province. Be proud of our agricultural base. Be proud of our farmers. Go defend them and stop — and as I mention time and time again — stop farming the farmers for political support. And that's exactly what they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

Now as you know, as the member from Kindersley disagrees with them, with the official opposition leader when he says small farms are out. He's been quoted in papers. So I say to all the farmers out there, all the farmers, there's no question, ladies and gentlemen, that agriculture's training . . . is changing. There's a lot of training needs out there to make sure that we're able to take advantage of some of the opportunities when it comes to the world markets.

(15:15)

But I know one thing, is this side is going to be realistic; this side is not going to take advantage of the farmers. And I would say to every farmer out there, is check on the track record of the Canadian Alliance. Check on the track record of their leaders, Stockwell Day and certainly Manning, and see the division happening over there. These guys don't know whether they like CFIP or AIDA. They're not sure what they like over there.

Now what I wouldn't mind hearing as a member of this Assembly that has very limited exposure to agriculture, what exactly . . . what do those guys stand for, Mr. Speaker? What's their plan? You know what, Mr. Speaker? They don't have a plan. They don't have a plan.

Now there's no question on this side we believe in agriculture. But we know we have to adapt to agricultural needs in this province to be able to survive as a province. This province is hurting, and hurting bad. And all we see here in this Assembly is more doom and gloom and no plans over there in the confusing lot. They have no idea what they're doing, Mr. Speaker.

The question I have for them is, can you get your act together and tell us what kind of plan you have, attach some kind of reasoning to your plan, put some money into your plan, and stop farming the farmers for political gain. That's all we're asking. Let's work as a collective in this Assembly. Stop playing the cheap theatrics of sending every MLA to Ottawa when you know you should send every MLA to a number of countries that are subsidizing their farmers.

So my point today, Mr. Speaker, is people back home are going to ask me, why are you talking about agriculture? And I say to them that I sit in the Assembly and I listen to the opposition rant and rave about agriculture when I know they haven't got a plan.

All they're playing with agriculture . . . the only reason they're playing with agriculture is for political purposes, Mr. Speaker. And that's it.

So my question, when you talk about focusing on the Saskatchewan Party, make up your mind. What are you? Do you support subsidies for farmers in your free enterprise mantra? You're supposed to be free enterprisers. Do you support subsidies for the farmers — yes or no? Your national leaders, Manning and Day, say no.

So my point is, do you support rural Saskatchewan? Do you support urban Saskatchewan? Northern Saskatchewan? Yes or no? Make up your mind. Where are you guys going to go? Where are you going to fit? Are you going to be (a) pro-environment, or (b) pro-business? Or are you going to be (a) pro-rural Saskatchewan, or (b) pro-urban Saskatchewan?

Well I say to you today that on this side, on this side of the Assembly, we have a balanced approach. We're going to defend all interests of Saskatchewan plus we're going to be positive about what Saskatchewan's all about.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Mr. Speaker, I've got a list. Mr. Speaker, I've got a list here of all the help that Saskatchewan is going to help the farmers get. And the list says how Saskatchewan is helping to address the agricultural crisis.

And I was going to say I'm going to send a copy to the official opposition. But what I don't want them to do is to assume this. Because all of a sudden all the good things that are being planned here, they'll try and assume it and take credit for it when the fact of the matter is they never had a plan for agriculture. And it's to their advantage that the farmers keep suffering because it qualifies them politically. And I say enough of that.

Mr. Speaker, theatrics does not and will never help the farmers. And I suggest today to the official opposition is that you should stand with the coalition government today and fight together. Instead doom and gloom and hoping all hell breaks loose tomorrow — excuse my language, Mr. Speaker — but all heck breaks loose tomorrow. So all of a sudden they're standing here appearing to be the party's going to balance everybody's interests when that's far from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, you have to defend the family farm not the fertilizer companies. You have to adapt to what the markets pay a premium price for and not what the provincial treasury can afford. You have to help in emergency aid whether it be in direct payout, PST (provincial sales tax) exemptions, the . . . (inaudible) . . . Committee, property tax relief, and the list goes on. That's what we're doing this side.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's no question — you have to fight for the family farm so that your corporate plans to grow food does not happen. Consumers have to know that your plan, the Saskatchewan Party plan will result in greater food costs according to the member from Kindersley.

The reason why you've got to fight for family farms, for his

information, the reason why we have to fight for family farms, Mr. Speaker, is so that we can grow food on this land, this blessed land of Saskatchewan, at a price that the people of Saskatchewan can afford.

And what is happening there is they're hoping that the family farm goes away and their free enterprise mantra, that we have these corporate farms and these corporate farms will dominate what they grow and the prices will go up. The prices will go up, and you and I, Mr. Speaker, will pay more for that food. That's why we have to defend the family farm on this side. And our fights with Ottawa and our fights with all the other countries but across the way you say, no, the family farms, the family farms are not going to work. Family farms are not going to work.

So my question to them is: are you free enterprise, or do you believe in subsidizing the farmers? Are you for rural Saskatchewan or are you for urban? Well I say to you on this side of the street, we know where our bread is buttered on. We are supporting the farmers. We are supporting agriculture.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Mr. Speaker, we are trying to find a solution, a short-term solution, a medium-term solution, and a long-term solution. Something that you do not want to see it happens . . . is that they will not want to see that to happen because their political agenda will be lost.

So I say to the agricultural community — the agricultural community — I say to them do not let the opposition farm you for political support. They haven't got a plan. They've never had any coherent plan to begin with. Their agenda to come here is to come here, create confusion, spread doom and gloom, and say the world's going to end tomorrow. And our side, we say not, Mr. Speaker. We say not.

And then I say to you, I say to you a couple of things. You look, you look at the options that are available: organic farming, pulse crops, ethanol production, the cogeneration possibilities. All possibilities exist on this land, Mr. Speaker, but we have to change.

No question we have to change, and these guys don't want to see progress. They don't want to see success, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to see anything good happening over there because that'll displace them. And that's why there's a lot of doom and gloom.

Well I say to you doom and gloom . . . you know there's no room for doom and gloom in Saskatchewan.

And I'll give you one good example of agroforestry, Mr. Speaker — agroforestry. You know we tell folks back there in the northern Saskatchewan there's mills happening, you have an opportunity in forestry. And people out there are talking to us about the environment. So we say well agroforestry may have a good opportunity here. For example, we could tell forestry companies that maybe in the next 5, 10 years, that 5, 10, 15, 20 per cent of their wood supply would come from agroforestry. Wouldn't that help out the agricultural sector? The obvious answer is yes.

Two provinces, Mr. Speaker, in this country took advantage of that and they said yes, loud and clear. Agroforestry — there's an opportunity for that. One of them was Quebec and the other was Saskatchewan. That's what I call, Mr. Speaker, being proactive.

Now the agroforestry file for example, look at it. Not only will these companies begin to seek their wood supply from the farming sector, from the ag lands, but you would have less chemicals going into the ground, Mr. Speaker. There's other crop you can actually grow on the ground below the trees, and every year there's also carbon credits that you can get from planting trees, and the list goes on as to the value of agroforestry.

However, the other argument as well, Mr. Speaker, is that not only will you have a new supply of wood for these mills, but you would lower your demand on the natural forest stands in northern Saskatchewan thereby achieving the environmental balance that we've all been looking for. So not only do you have a win-win scenario for agriculture and the environment, but economically it makes a lot of sense.

So, Mr. Speaker, every time you come up with a solution to agriculture or a plan of some sort — oh no, no, it's not going to work; no, no, it's not going to work. You guys don't know what you're doing.

Well I submit today, they don't know what they're doing, Mr. Speaker. On this side we do.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — So the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line, the transition has to happen. We have to stand next to our farmers. We got to say the ability to grow land . . . to grow something on that land is very important; we recognize that and you're the best farmers in the world. But let's work together to have a transition strategy to grow crops or whatever product we can on that land that the markets will pay a premium price for.

And secondly is let's have some optimism in the province, Mr. Speaker. Where is the optimism? And you come to this Assembly, you come to the Assembly looking for optimism, what do they get? A big, dark cloud of doom and gloom, you know, just hovers around this place. And we got to defend Saskatchewan against that doom and gloom.

And every time you hear some bright story out of that end, Mr. Speaker, it's Alberta — Alberta this, Alberta that, Alberta this, Alberta that. Well I say to you on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan that if you love Alberta so much, move there.

We got a province, we got a province to defend here. And if you're elected people from this province, you defend Saskatchewan — you don't talk about Alberta, you don't talk about Alberta. Your fight is here in the province of Saskatchewan. What are you doing going to Alberta? You defend Saskatchewan's interests. You're elected by the people of Saskatchewan — you defend our interests. You promote our province. You don't try and kill our province. You don't spread doom and gloom.

Well I say to you, Mr. Speaker, across the way, one of these days in this Assembly, one of those members is going to get up and they're going to say privately, this is a good government. And that day, Mr. Speaker, is going to be this Friday.

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Mr. Speaker, I'm going to close on a couple of points. The first point . . .

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

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — The members opposite are cheering. But I'm going to make a couple of points, a couple points, a couple points. I say to them that as a person from northern Saskatchewan, I know that agriculture plays a very important part in life even in northern Saskatchewan. But what I'm not going to do is come here and play politics with agriculture.

I want to say to the people of Saskatchewan, I don't know a whole lot of agriculture but I know one thing, in this Assembly they're playing on some of the agricultural challenges for political gain. No more, no more.

And number two, and number two is this coalition government has sat back and listened to the doom and gloom scenario — the world's going to end tomorrow; oh, nothing you guys do is good, everything's bad; oh, Alberta this, Alberta that. Well I tell you today, we're not going to take it any more. We're going to fight for Saskatchewan's interests and that starts now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mr. Stewart:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to congratulate Mr. Speaker and Mr. Deputy Speaker on their recent elections to their posts. I'm sure that you'll serve this Hon. Assembly with distinction, both of you.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm proud to represent the hard-working, productive people of Thunder Creek. People who work exceptionally hard in their businesses, their professions, and occupations and on their farms and ranches. The productivity of these people is second to none. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are very busy, industrious people.

These fine people, however, regard politicians with a certain degree of suspicion.

**An Hon. Member:** — Not you.

**Mr. Stewart:** — Not me.

And when I look at this document — this so-called Speech from the Throne — I don't blame them. I would be embarrassed, Mr. Speaker, if my constituency knew that all of us here will spend a week or so debating this document. This so-called Speech from the Throne that contains nothing of any real substance whatsoever.

It's a rehash of old programs previously announced. It's filled with phony economic comparisons, not between Saskatchewan

and other provinces, Mr. Speaker, but comparisons of the dismal economic performance of this province from one disappointing year under this administration to another.

The third component of this document can only be described as misleading rhetoric about the legislative intentions of this tired government. A government apparently completely devoid of any new ideas on any subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a Throne Speech is supposed to layout a blueprint of the legislative intentions of the government. If this document is any indication of the intentions of the government in this session of the legislature, it is truly a stinging indictment on a tired, old, decrepit government with only their own self-interested heart in a desperate bid to hold onto power for as long as possible.

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

(15:30)

**Mr. Stewart:** — They talk, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of a thriving economy, quoting their own numbers to make their case. But the people of Saskatchewan will remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that according to undisputed Statistics Canada figures, this province lost 13,000 jobs last year, while Manitoba, a province far less naturally endowed than Saskatchewan, was able to create 7,000 new jobs last year. And in Alberta in the same year, last year, 43,000 new jobs were created, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This government makes no pretense in this document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of having any kind of a plan to expand our economy. In a province where we lose jobs and businesses and farms, and saddest of all our people every day to our neighbouring provinces and to other jurisdictions, it is absolutely shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this government cannot come up with any kind of a plan for economic development in Saskatchewan — this province of such outstanding economic potential.

Saskatchewan is truly the last frontier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for investment and economic growth. But this weary, old government continues to stumble along and miss the opportunities that would unleash the economic power that is Saskatchewan's natural gift.

This government reminds me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of a tired, old, sick horse — a horse that knows it won't likely live until morning. Like this government, the horse stumbles along in the dark, nearly falling from time to time, but the instinct for survival keeps the old horse stumbling along in the dark in no particular direction long after its only purpose is to simply carry on.

This Speech from the Throne, Mr. Deputy Speaker, contains absolutely no new tax reduction initiatives. All of our taxes in this province are far too high. Combined, these taxes make Saskatchewan the second highest tax jurisdiction in North America. As a result of our high taxes, investment is stifled. And because of the lack of investment, this province has the poorest job-creation record in the country.

All of our taxes — income tax, PST, capital tax, small-business tax, property tax, royalty rates, utility rates, and every other form of taxation, direct or indirect, must be competitive with our neighbouring jurisdictions in order for us to attract investment and the accompanying career opportunities that would keep our people in this great province.

The sum total of new tax reform initiatives in this document, Mr. Speaker, is zero. What the Speech from the Throne does contain is a rehash of old initiatives. Old initiatives spun a little differently in an attempt to dupe the people of this province into believing that they are being offered something new.

The treasury of this province is, or ought to be, bursting with hundreds of millions of dollars from oil and gas due to huge increases in oil and gas prices not anticipated in the last budget. Now is the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this government to take the plunge and reduce taxes and royalties, targeted reductions, to attract investment in this province. This is not the time to squander the windfall profits from oil and gas in a wild spending spree.

A responsible government would take this opportunity to grow the economy, so that increased revenues for the government and improved career opportunities for the people of Saskatchewan would be the rule in the future, rather than the exception.

Most Saskatchewan people consider health care to be the number one issue, province-wide. Shamefully, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Speech from the Throne is absolutely silent on health care. Should we assume from this that with the longest surgical waiting list in the country, looming shortages of professionals in all disciplines associated with health care, and most health districts in severe financial stress, that this government has no plan for health care?

The problems in health care are not new, Mr. Speaker. This government has had 10 years to grapple with these problems. And during this time, each of these problems has worsened dramatically. And if this government has any solutions whatsoever, I find it odd that they would not bear mentioning in this document; this document that purports to be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a blueprint for this government's legislative agenda.

With regard to social services, this Throne Speech dredges up previously announced programs going back as far as 1997 and attempts to spin them into something that the public will accept as new and some sort of a new direction. Also on the social side, Mr. Speaker, this sad, old, tired government attempts to take credit for the \$73 million childhood development program aimed at children in high-risk communities.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pardon me, the \$73 million in funding for this program is all federal government money announced late last summer by the federal minister in charge. It is inexcusable that this government would be involved in such a shallow attempt to take credit for such an important and long overdue program, apparently just so they would have something of substance to put in this document.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne this government announces its intention to connect with the young. They announce their intentions to do this in typical NDP

fashion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by creating a new Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation. The document lays out no mandate for this new department, this new bureaucracy if you like, other than a few broad generalities about connecting with young people.

This exercise in intervention as politics will cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan millions of dollars. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I predict that the only young people who will ever be connected with . . . through this department will be the young NDP political hacks hired by it.

As regards the environment, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne states the government's intention to ensure that oil and gas wells are properly decommissioned and reclaimed. This government knows, or ought to know, that the oil and gas industry already takes care of that in a very responsible manner through the industry's own Orphaned Wells Fund. The government's only other initiative under the heading of environment is a vague statement of their intentions to invest taxpayers' dollars in some airy-fairy wind policy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, agriculture is Saskatchewan's founding industry and still Saskatchewan's most important industry. When the farms and ranches do poorly, the whole economy, rural and urban, suffers. In spite of the importance of agriculture to this province, the only item of any significance in this document regarding agriculture is the announcement of the long-awaited Saskatchewan Conservation Cover Program.

This program pays \$15 an acre to a maximum of 50 acres, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for farm operation, for seeding perennial cover on only the most marginal of farmland. Fifty acres, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How silly that sounds to serious commercial agricultural producers. Why bother at all? The administration for this program is likely to cost as much as any benefit that may flow to farmers.

This government has created an office of Rural Revitalization, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there's no indication in the Throne Speech of any mandate for this office either. Accordingly, we must assume that is just another bureaucracy that will filter and muddle the message between rural Saskatchewan and this dying government, another bureaucracy to shield the members of this government from the wrath of rural Saskatchewan.

Incredibly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the responsibility for this office has been given to the Minister of Highways, the same minister who is charged with implementing this government's policy of turning some of our secondary highways back to gravel and reducing weight limits on others so as to make them useless for commerce. This deprives dozens of communities — many with substantial existing businesses and industries, and many more that had plans to build businesses and industries — of paved, all-weather truck access that is so crucial to the success of almost any business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it serves to underscore the disconnect that exists between this government and rural Saskatchewan that the same minister who is literally cutting the lifelines to rural Saskatchewan is also responsible for Rural Revitalization.

This is not just a rural issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that this debate is broadcast into many homes in the major urban centres of this province, and those people will understand that their jobs and the jobs of their children and grandchildren depend directly or indirectly on economic development. In this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, economic development generally starts in rural areas, in agricultural value added, in manufacturing, in oil and gas, in tourism, mining, and forestry industries, and the list goes on and on.

My point is that if this province is to see any real economic development, it will begin in rural Saskatchewan. But the spinoff will create jobs in our urban centres.

How then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, could any government that is minding the store cut the lifeline to economic development in rural areas by rendering our highways useless for commerce, and not expect the pain to be felt in our urban centres.

Each of us in the official opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the year and a half since the election, have developed comprehensive plans as to how we would proceed in our critic areas if we were to become the government. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have comprehensive plans as to how we would proceed in Agriculture, Highways, Health, Education, Forestry, Energy and Mines, Environment, Aboriginal Affairs, and every other area of government endeavour.

How that contrasts with this stumbling, old government that goes in circles, waffles back and forth and contradicts itself, and is generally going nowhere. A government that, according to this Speech from the Throne, cannot come up with one solid idea that would help to solve some of the problems of this province.

Their only solutions are to create new departments and offices and bureaucracies, and to spend millions of taxpayers' dollars on wild government ventures that are destined to fail as they always do.

Mr. Speaker, as a blueprint for action by this government, this Speech from the Throne fails to address any of the major problems that plague this great province. It suggests nothing to attract investment, nothing to help agriculture, nothing for health or education or social services or Aboriginal people or the environment, and does nothing to keep our young people and our professionals in this province.

Accordingly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do . . . I will not support this Throne Speech and I do support the amendment advanced by the Leader of the Opposition.

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

(15:45)

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm so pleased to be able to rise today to talk about this year's Speech from the Throne, and all of the accomplishments and challenges and positive things that we have to look forward to here in Saskatchewan.

I'd like to take this opportunity to personally congratulate the

Speaker on his election to the Speaker of this Assembly. It's been one week and already we can see how adept and professional he is at managing his new position within the Assembly. It's clearly evident that all those years teaching at the Carlton Comprehensive High School in Prince Albert have now been put to good use.

All of us know how very challenging and daunting this task may be from time to time, but I'm confident that with your patience, and Mr. Speaker's patience and wisdom and the strong discipline, that you will keep us going in the right direction.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also congratulate you, my colleague from Regina Sherwood, on your election as Deputy Speaker. You will, I know as well, keep everyone and everything in proper order when Mr. Speaker is away from his chair, as you are doing this afternoon for us in the Assembly.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to a few new people. First, the people who manage this Assembly so well, some of whom are returning and others who, like Mr. Viktor Kaczkowski, would say that probably on many evenings they feel like they're a captive audience. But, Mr. Speaker, they certainly do serve us well seated at the Table and keeping us in legal order and in good parliamentary proceedings that would occur here.

Welcome to the Sergeant-at-Arms and the staff. And also welcome to our new pages this year. We already appreciate the amount of time and the running and effort that you've put in to keeping us organized and the work that you do for us here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to start today by telling members of the House why I became involved in Saskatchewan politics and why I'm proud to stand here today and speak to this year's Throne Speech.

First, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the constituents of Regina Wascana Plains for giving me the pleasure and the opportunity to represent them for another legislative session. It's with their support and encouragement that I will be able to be a part of putting many pieces forward in the legislative session and deal with the many issues that this government has to face.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my colleagues who provide the support as we look forward to the same positive working relationship throughout the year and we look forward to the challenges presented by the opposition as they question us. And certainly I'm sure they'll have many complimentary things to say about the budget that's coming forward in this week.

It's been said, Mr. Speaker, that a government is only as strong as the opposition that's presented, and so I'm looking forward to the challenges they would present. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you I haven't been able to quite look forward to the kinds of gloom and doom that they presented so far in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, people who are in Saskatchewan and the constituents I represent don't want to hear gloom and doom. They live here because they chose to live here. They live here because of the quality of life that's afforded to them and their

families.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell everyone in the Assembly that my constituency is quite unique. It's one of the four urban-rural seats in this province, in taking a portion of the southeast corner of Regina and several of the surrounding communities. Its boundary starts at the Highway 1 bypass near the University of Regina, follows along the east side of Pilot Butte creek, east on the Trans-Canada Highway as far north as the Grid no. 734, extending east to Balgonie and south to Rowatt.

The constituency includes vibrant communities of Balgonie, Pilot Butte, White City, Jameson and Richardson to name a few. Now Jameson is a unique little community with a few people there, but they certainly are people who keep in touch with me as do many other constituents within the surrounding communities that I've mentioned. You would know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my constituents are civil servants, they're farmers, they're business people, educators, and labourers, just to name a few.

I think it was first, I believe, in 1982, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I started to pound the pavement in what was then Ward 4 in the city of Regina that coincided with the boundaries of my constituency in 1991. Today this ward is ably represented by Councillor Michael Fougere.

So why would I become involved? Well at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was involved with my family at an early age in their development, working through the community association to improve the quality of life in our community. There were issues that we hear about today, but they were there as well then — school bussing, traffic concerns, roadway patterns.

As a matter of fact, one just came up recently when the city had announced a roadways plan and some of the same issues that were present there came up in this report. And we were able to work with those communities and talk through those issues once again, because we believe as a community you pull together and work through those issues.

I was elected in 1985. The people of the constituency put their trust in me and I have tried hard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to live up to those expectations and the faith they placed in me to bring their concerns and issues not only now to the cabinet table, but to all of my colleagues in government caucus. And on the occasion to bring up their issues and concerns to the members opposite so they'll better understand that the actions that they take here in this Assembly also impact on the future of not only rural Saskatchewan but urban Saskatchewan as well.

In my tenure on city council, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I served as the Chair of the task force on women's issues, and it was referenced recently in a housing report done by the Government of Canada. I was a member of that task force and chaired that task force because at the time we saw the impact of many of the programs and the policies of then the Tory government that were having a detrimental impact on not only women in the community but families.

We had a government then so totally out of touch of the reality of people who lived in the communities and the stresses that

impacted on them, particularly of women living in violent situations, women living in poverty, and it was time to speak out; it was time to see how we could impact a change on an uncaring and unfeeling Tory government. Sad to say I see many of the same people that supported that government in the Assembly facing me opposite today. And I really haven't heard much that tells me that their attitudes to these issues have changed dramatically.

I was also a member of the mayor's board of inquiry into hunger and poverty. And I had the privilege at a time to serve as the interim mayor of Regina.

The inquiry into poverty and hunger was an interesting one because we know that it took many, many years after that for us to be able to get into the situation where we could address some of the devastation of the years that the Tories provided in the '80s and the impact that had on the proliferation of the use of the food banks, on people saying — like a former member of this Assembly would say — there are no hungry people in Saskatchewan. Turning their eyes in a blind way to all of the hurting that was happening in urban centres, but also not coming to terms with the solutions that would be at hand to address those, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Since then we've developed the building to independence strategy. Many of those initiatives were completing of the circle of the recommendations we made at that time. We knew that many of the supports that were in place for people who were on social assistance dropped away from those people who were trying to make a go in the working world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, once they came into the workforce, many of the help and supports to have them become active members of the economy left them immediately, not giving them a chance to take their place in the working world and the economy of our province. And many of those initiatives today address those concerns.

And the results? The results we're seeing, slow but sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the numbers of people who now have moved off the social assistance rolls, and for the second year in a row to have negative figures when we're talking about child poverty and hunger in this community of our Saskatchewan.

Progress is being made. It's not the kind of progress that the members opposite would brag about. In fact, they don't even ask us what we're doing in those areas or what we're going to do to continue that work. And I haven't heard one thing they would do to further these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The work that I'm referring to and the positive work I'm talking about is highly reflected in this session's Throne Speech. It tells you something when they're not able to recognize anything positive from that speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It tells you something when you advance those goals and those initiatives that are going to take us in to the next number of years ahead that are going to connect us to the future, and they can't even recognize them, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, because I hear from

them that somehow we don't have the moral authority to be governing in this Assembly, and that we're on a decline and they're sort of an Alberta wannabe government-in-waiting in this province. But I would like to remind them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we've had a wonderful leadership process that has been in place in the province throughout the months of December and January and has provided us with a Premier that we're all proud to stand behind and support in this Assembly.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — I also want to say we have a wonderful new member that provides the energy and the ideas that come from young people who've been out there and supported the work that was done by the member from Elphinstone to make him the newest member of our Assembly, or second newest member; and along with the member from Saskatoon Meewasin who very eloquently moved the Speech from the Throne, we were able to hear from our member from Regina Elphinstone.

So a first for him, seconding the motion, and I'd like to welcome him to the Legislative Assembly and congratulate him on his successful bid in representing the members from that constituency.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — I had the honour from time to time to talk with those constituents, young and old. They say, isn't it refreshing to have someone who will come out, be a part of our community, work hard for us. And seniors, Mr. Speaker, spoke to me about the appreciative efforts that they feel he's made in going out to their doorsteps, in talking with them and working with them and settling into that neighbourhood in which he was raised and he grew up, Mr. Speaker. So congratulations to that member.

Now I'd like to just say a few more words about the member from Saskatoon Riversdale and welcome him back to this Assembly.

He's indeed been a very busy man these past few months, but all of his hard work and the efforts and the determination has finally paid off. And I'm pleased and proud to be able to sit in this Legislative Assembly with our member from Saskatoon Riversdale — our government's leader and Premier.

And I'm looking forward, through this legislative session with him, to be able to put forward the initiatives that were announced in the Throne Speech. And I know that all my hon. colleagues are looking forward to the months ahead as well as we tell the people of Saskatchewan how we can connect to the future, get Saskatchewan ready to take advantage of the positive initiatives and the positive energies that will take us into the future being the best province in this country in which to live.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — This is a perfect time to start a new session and the business of the Speech from the Throne, with spring coming. Now today we haven't quite felt that warm wind yet and the warm weather and the sunshine, but it's coming. It's coming, Mr. Deputy Speaker; it's officially spring.

And I'd like to take the time now to highlight a new . . . the new and exciting and talented ideas that the people of Saskatchewan have put forward to us, we've worked with to be able to make sure that they come true for them. In short, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you more about the vision for Saskatchewan that's connecting us to the future.

Last week's Speech from the Throne by our Lieutenant Governor was one full of optimism, prosperity, and success, contrary to what the members opposite have been saying. They're going to wallow in gloom and doom; they're going to be the Alberta wannabes; they're the ones trash-talking Saskatchewan. But not us, Mr. Speaker. We won't be doing that.

Now if they took the time to talk to their chambers of commerce, if they took the time to talk to their constituents, they would know that their constituents don't want them to talk down Saskatchewan either.

(16:00)

And if they heard, day in and day out, the kinds of messages about everything is a disaster in Saskatchewan, there's a crisis in everything in Saskatchewan, there's no economic development in Saskatchewan, it's the worst taxed constituency in the country is our Saskatchewan, they would be disappointed and ashamed that their members are representing that kind of trash talk in this Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Speech from the Throne is anything but that. The Speech from the Throne tells us that there are many important initiatives that we need to take to connect the people to the future of our province and to be active contributors to society and to our economy.

So, before I comment on that, I would like to have a look forward to see . . . instead of looking forward for a moment, I just want to remind the members opposite, and give them a refresher course on what we have accomplished. Now this may take some time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there's been plenty accomplished in this province.

Let's start first with the economy. The average annual growth rate for the province from 1992 to 1999 was 3.4 per cent. This matches the Canadian average and ranks third among all other provinces. Figures from the year 2000 show an increase in exports, an increase in manufacturing, an increase in oil and gas production, an increase in potash and mineral production, an increase in retail sales and the sales of motor vehicles. And if I may, Mr. Speaker, quote directly from last Thursday's edition of the Regina *Leader-Post*:

Regina will "buck the trend" by posting a 2.5 per cent economic growth in 2001.

On top of all this, the amount of disposable income will also rise. Analysts predict that the disposal income among Saskatchewan people will climb by 5.1 per cent, primarily due to the tax cut measures at both the federal and now the provincial level, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In 2000 Saskatchewan created a record number of new jobs.

You wouldn't hear that from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker — it's gloom and doom, no jobs in Saskatchewan. Well, Mr. Speaker, the number of new jobs totalled over 5,000 in the course of one year. Our unemployment rate in January 2001 was 5.6 per cent — the third lowest in the entire country — and well below the national average of 6.9 per cent.

Employment forecasts also predict a strong showing for the year ahead, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This economic development was evident in my constituency. The east side of Regina along the Trans-Canada Highway has seen tremendous growth in the past couple of years with countless businesses — restaurants, shops, and retail chain stores — springing up every year.

These stores provide jobs and a place for people in the surrounding areas to shop and to come together to talk about the positive aspects of developing the economic development of our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now in a constituency like mine, both urban and rural, one of the important things that's talked about in all of the coffee shops, of course, is taxation. Taxes are very important to my constituents, since many of them are within the middle- to upper-income brackets in the urban areas and they feel they pay high taxes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And many of them are in rural Saskatchewan who welcome the tax initiative with the education portion of the property but are also saying it's very, very difficult with the kind of economy in some sectors of rural Saskatchewan. And so therefore the discussion on taxes and the amount they would pay is very important to them as well.

And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, with this government there is always good news regarding tax reform. Every year that we've been in government we have had a tax measure, a tax initiative, that would either spur the economy on in certain sectors or be a sustainable reduction in taxes for the average person in our province, Mr. Speaker — every year since we've been in government. And no small accomplishment when you face the kind of debt load that the members opposite, many of them the faces who peep up from time to time, in the previous Tory government now appear behind the desks opposite.

Upon entering office this government was paying for an average family . . . You would see the average family when we took government, again a Tory legacy, was paying the highest income tax in all of Canada. We inherited that. We didn't create that. What do we see now? I guess I could also, at this moment, put in we also inherited the second highest debt level in the country second only to Newfoundland. That was the legacy we inherited and that's what they're so proud of, and when they're not proud of it, they try and duck and hide and say, oh no, it wasn't us; we're some kind of new, new party; we changed our name you know, so we must be different.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm happy to tell you that this is no longer the case. Our income tax rates have dropped a total of four times over the past seven years — dropped four times. Do we hear that from the members opposite? No. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Taxes are going to come down again in 2002 and in 2003.

In 1992 the total tax bill for an average Saskatchewan family was the second highest in the country, and by 2000 it was the

fourth lowest. Mr. Speaker, the fourth lowest.

What do we hear today from the members opposite? We're the highest taxed jurisdiction in the country. Wrong. More gloom and doom and painting a picture that just isn't there. How do we compete when we've got such ambassadors going out in rural Saskatchewan and going across this country talking about things like that?

Mr. Speaker, surely they would know that if you want to have a positive look at this province, you have to be the ones that give the positive view to this province and this country.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — We're doing our part, Mr. Speaker, and we've accomplished much. We're maintaining balanced budgets and we're maintaining the tax cuts that we've announced since 1995. Because when we were cutting taxes, Mr. Speaker, we were making certain that they would be sustainable. Not a we're cutting this, oh whoops, we don't mean that; we're not going to cut that because it just doesn't add up.

And even their own economic analysis group over there will tell you that their tax cuts just don't add up. They are not sustainable, Mr. Speaker. And furthermore, they know, because they've been told, they've been told that the tax cuts that they contemplate incurring on this province will mean higher unemployment and fewer jobs for young people in this province. And still they persist.

Mr. Speaker, these accomplishments are also consistent throughout everything that government is doing. Staff and employees of every department or agency have worked extremely hard ensuring government services are delivered to those many people across this province who need them with an efficiency and effectiveness second to none.

And, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the civil service of this province and take pride in the work that they do and the face that they put forward to the customer on the ground in this province.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — With that, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I'd like to take a few moments to talk about the departments and agencies that I have responsibility for. First, the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority is one of those departments. Its mission is to distribute, control, and regulate liquor and gaming products throughout Saskatchewan in ways that promote social responsibility, fairness, and cost-effectiveness.

It's again another area where all we hear from the members opposite is gloom and doom. And many of them . . . I've heard the privatization word, even though we have the experience of the Alberta privatization and many other provinces who have tried it, and we say that it just does not work for the customer service in Saskatchewan as well as the balancing of social responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, SLGA (Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming



Authority) owns and operates video lottery terminals located in licensed establishments, slot machines in SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority) casinos, and regulates charity gaming and casino activity in the province.

All I've heard from the members opposite is let's take a total review. They haven't told us whether they'll continue this involvement or not, and there are people and agencies out there who need to know.

What would you do? What should you do as an Alberta government wannabe-in-waiting here in the province of Saskatchewan?

**The Speaker:** — Order. Order, order. I've asked members in this House to make their remarks through the Chair. I would ask the hon. minister in her speeches to do likewise.

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of attending the Hotels Association annual convention. And they want to know what does government plan to do in the area of gaming, in the area of regulating control of beverage products. And I'm sure that they'd be very interested to hear from the members opposite what kind of support their industry and the hospitality industry can look forward to in the future. We're connecting to the future, Mr. Speaker, and they want to know what those members say about that.

We all know the year 2000 has been a challenging one for SLGA, but it's also one that held many accomplishments.

New legislation surrounding the liquor industry was passed. New guidelines were put in place to maintain the integrity of our casino industry. And SLGA continually worked towards ways to enhance both delivery and regulation of liquor and gaming services to the people of Saskatchewan all the while maintaining the operation of liquor and gaming industries to provide thousands of jobs to people in Saskatchewan and in rural Saskatchewan.

Another department I'm responsible for is Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation. SPMC is a Crown corporation that provides accommodation and commercial services to other Crown corporations, government departments, boards, commissions, and various non-governmental organizations as well.

Close to my constituency, Regina Wascana Plains, SPMC worked with Post-Secondary Education on the SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) redevelopment project. It's a wonderful project for post-secondary students in this province, Mr. Speaker, and accessibility to first-class technical training for many, many people from urban and rural Saskatchewan.

Education was one of the very important highlights in the Throne Speech and I'm happy to say that SPMC played a pivotal role in ensuring the transition in that program ran very smoothly and efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, education was a pivotal part of the Speech from the Throne — an important part of initiatives that are going forward — and did we hear that from the members opposite? No. What do we hear from the members opposite? Well they would freeze education spending in this province. No new programs that I hear that they have in mind.

And they still continue the gloom and doom of talking about people who want to be in Saskatchewan and want to stay here — our students — and yet can say that they haven't heard anything positive about education in this province. Shame, Mr. Speaker. How do you recruit? How do you retain people in this province with an attitude like that?

Mr. Speaker, SPMC can also give the people of this province a big pat on the back for allowing them the dollars that are needed to maintain and preserve an important part of the heritage of this province — and we're standing in it today — our Legislative Building.

The upgrading and renovating of a building such as this legislature, Mr. Speaker, is no small task and we need only look around us to see the job well done. SPMC used state-of-the-art technology, equipment, and labour to ensure the job was done and done right.

They established a Web site so school students and their parents across this province could view the progress on the building. They involved, whenever possible, the people in this province on taking pride in the work that was being done to maintain the heritage of this province for future generations.

And one interesting note. A school in my constituency, St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, placed a time capsule in a dome in the change from the 20th century to the 21st century. It's kind of interesting what they put in there — Pokémon cards, and what's hot and what's not in Regina. And they were so excited to not only see the progress on this building but to be able to hide away a time capsule for people in many, many generations to come to be able to understand their lives in the 21st century.

(16:15)

Later this spring, Mr. Speaker, I will have a pleasure of showing the rest of the world SPM's greatest achievement. It's being worked on right now and it's accessibility entrance to this building, Mr. Speaker. And I think we will all be proud when we have the opportunity to see the completion of that project.

I would also like the other members of the House to join me in congratulating SPMC for ensuring that this building is here for years to come and for accommodating us all during these renovations. No small task, but again a task done well.

SPMC strives to consistently deliver cost-effective service to its customers, pursue new and evolving opportunities and maintain an innovative and highly skilled group of employees. And they're not employees just in this community, Mr. Speaker, but in communities throughout the province. They take pride in the buildings that government is housed in and the services that they provide to people in rural Saskatchewan.

One of SPMC's many accomplishments is very interesting, Mr.

Speaker. We know from the past year that the corporation's maiden voyage is now into the world of e-commerce through ShopSPMC. ShopSPMC has proven to be an effective tool to provide better service to our customers and this program allows SPMC customers to purchase goods and services via the Internet saving a considerable amount of time and effort.

And as I mentioned that's just not within government but some of the non-governmental agencies that we serve as well, Mr. Speaker.

SPMC's four cornerstones will ensure it will maintain customer focus, financial performance, employee focus and a focus on sound public policy. I am confident this organization can continue to build on these cornerstones.

Just recently, Mr. Speaker, I was appointed the Minister Responsible for the Women's Secretariat, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. This secretariat is an agency of the provincial government. It works to ensure that women's perspectives and realities are reflected in government policies and programs.

The secretariat's work focuses on three main areas: research, policy development and public education. In the past few years the secretariat has addressed such issues as violence against women, labour standards, and balancing work and family options.

This week, Mr. Speaker, the Women's Secretariat is holding a conference entitled *If Gender Mattered . . . Policy and Strategies to Advance Women's Equality*. It's a workshop of professionals who are going to learn from each other and community partners about an issue that is vital to Government of Saskatchewan. And I'm honoured to stand today, Mr. Speaker, and tell other members what important work this department does to promote the status of women in today's world.

Now again, Mr. Speaker, I have to wonder because a member opposite stands and talks about the conference, *If Gender Mattered*, Mr. Speaker, and they're telling us — and I hope it's true — that gender matters to them and they're interested in the conference. Eyes are on them from the community to see if they're going to take seriously the recommendations that flow from this conference.

I want to spend a few moments talking about it. First I'm going to talk about the mandate of Women's Secretariat so that they know more about that and that our communities know more about it — it's very important in mine. And I'd like to congratulate my colleague, the member from Regina Centre, who is also the Minister Responsible for Youth, Culture and Recreation because it was her idea, with the Women's Secretariat, to bring people together from across this country to talk about the policy and research that needs to happen within government, to make certain, Mr. Speaker, that gender does matter.

The mandate of the Women's Secretariat is an agency of the provincial government. It works to provide strategic leadership and policy direction to government on issues affecting the status of women. Through the Secretariat, approaches for addressing

women's issues are centralized and coordinated. Our goal of achieving economic security and independence, safety and well-being for Saskatchewan women is done through a broad base of work across government and in our communities.

We ensure that the views and perspectives of Saskatchewan women are brought to the policy and program agendas of both the provincial and federal levels of government. In order to represent the issues and concerns relevant to Saskatchewan women, we work to maintain a close relationship with stakeholders in all the communities of Saskatchewan.

The conference. This conference, as I said, was originally conceptualized by my predecessor. Her vision was to conduct an evidence-based research symposium that would bring together academics and researchers with decision-makers in government as well as the community.

With initial parameters in place — *If Gender Mattered Policies and Strategies to Advance Women's Equality* — it's going to be presented in effective and timely means for the secretariat to provide leadership to increase our collective understanding of gender-based analysis.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, to understand what it means to assess the differential impact of policies, programs, and legislation on men and women, and furthermore, to consider how we can go about doing that work more effectively.

In the global context, we know we've had unprecedented change and there's complexity to the issues that face us. But the stage has been set for talking about the need to bridge the gaps of culture, race, ethnicity, and gender. To this end, Mr. Speaker, important international, national, provincial, and territorial commitments have been made that call for the integration of gender-inclusive analysis into the decision-making process of government.

I'm looking forward to the support of the members opposite to make certain this important work continues. They will know that it's critical to many of the things that we've talked about in all-party committees, particularly the committee that's looking at violence and abuse of women and children in the sex trade in this province.

This conference demonstrates a strong linkage with the secretariat's objectives of improving information to support policy decisions that impact women, and the increasing knowledge and capacity the community has in their efforts to address the status of women issues.

So consequently, Mr. Speaker, this conference is designed to achieve a balance in the relationship between the many challenges that face women in our communities and how we can have that eye to the decision-making tables and make certain when we make advances that information's available to sustain those advances and progress into the future.

The last area of responsibility, Mr. Speaker, is indeed one that I call a glorious responsibility — it's the Wascana Centre Authority. It does border my constituency.

The management and staff of Wascana Centre Authority ensure

this little oasis on the vast prairie remains green, clean, safe, and fun. Mr. Speaker, it's highly involved with the Capitals Commission because it is, indeed, our own little capital commission. It's a very important group of professionals that ensure our capital city works with other capital cities in preserving our natural and historic heritage.

It's also an area that highlights and profiles the seat of government, and entertains many tourists from not only this province, but also schoolchildren who come into the Authority to take advantage of the Science Centre, the waterfowl park, and many, many things that they're able to enjoy within the Wascana Centre Authority.

So, Mr. Speaker, as you can see, all of the departments that I have a responsibility for oversight and management hold tremendous potential.

The potential of this province is also tremendous. And I'm not going to even buy in for one moment to the kinds of lack of understanding and the lack of potential that the members opposite have laid out.

As they say, there's absolutely nothing that they can connect to in the Throne Speech — when what we're doing is connecting with people, connecting with communities, connecting the information highway into the future. Connecting to the future, Mr. Speaker. It's clearly laid out in the 2001 Throne Speech. It's there for us to look for, to vision together, and to dream about, and it's there for us to put into strength and to practise, Mr. Speaker, so that all people work together with us to see that this vision becomes a reality.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — We have a thriving economy. We have investments in the information highway. We're ensuring that communities throughout this province have access to government services, to health and essential services. We have the facilities here to connect them, not only to government but to information globally.

We have investments in the community. We have investments in the community that our department of Rural Revitalization can tell you about and more, through the infrastructure programs, the Canada/Sask Infrastructure Program. We have investments in rural Saskatchewan with increased spending on agricultural programs, the development of new programs that will help farming families take advantage of other opportunities with transition programs.

And they even, you know, laugh at some of the programs that will help people to put marginal lands back into some kind of pasture production that will assist them in some of the diversification that we talked about. Small steps even, but taken one at a time are big steps for the future of farming in this province and they choose to ignore it totally, Mr. Speaker, or pooh pooh or laugh about them.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's one thing to laugh, it's one thing to ridicule; it's another thing as a government in waiting, an Alberta government wannabe albeit; it's one thing to have the responsibility to come clean, to tell rural Saskatchewan

what you would do, and to speak with one voice. Not one voice from a leader and another voice from an ag critic and another voice from someone who stands up and says he has no answers but he still wants to criticize, Mr. Speaker. They have a responsibility to rural Saskatchewan and we should hear that.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend our member, our Minister of Agriculture, who's worked very hard in his job in advancing the issues that are very important to all Saskatchewan people.

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

**Hon. Ms. Hamilton:** — He's worked hard with farm families and with our committees to look at programs that we could structure to support them. And he's worked with one voice with other provincial leaders to take to the federal government. They know not all of the problems facing rural Saskatchewan are the result of some things that have happened in our community called Saskatchewan. They're federal pressures, but they're international pressures.

And we need to be able to take a unified voice forward consistently, Mr. Speaker — not one voice when they go from here and another voice the minute they come home and collapse and sing a different song.

Mr. Speaker, they'd say we wouldn't understand farming issues, but of course anyone that lives in an urban area is not far from the land. We have relatives in rural Saskatchewan. I have constituents in rural Saskatchewan. So I really take offence, Mr. Speaker, when they tell me I wouldn't understand the issues of rural Saskatchewan because I'm as in touch with my constituents as they are with theirs.

And one of the times that I've had a chance to get out there and talk to people is through the Century Family Farm Awards that are given out to rural Saskatchewan. I had the opportunity last year to be at one farm in my constituency, the Vetteridge family farm, led by Dorothy Vetteridge. And it was a wonderful time for family and friends and the rural neighbours in my constituency to celebrate the advancements that are made in rural Saskatchewan. And they've been the same awards that I've been able to attend with the member from Cannington and awards throughout this province as we see many people who are receiving the Century Family Farm Awards.

Much has been said about transportation, and our Minister of Rural Revitalization and Highways and Transportation should be commended for the amount of money that we're putting forward, not only in the last budgets but when we've had more money available to look forward to a fall program to start early on this year's transportation program. And we'll look forward to hearing more about those initiatives in the budget.

So I commend her on the work that she's doing to work with rural Saskatchewan in revitalization, not in talking about it's the end is near, the sky is falling. She's out there with a positive goal and an initiative. She comes from a rural family, she knows those issues, and she'll bring those forward and talk to the members opposite in the months ahead about what we are doing, not what can't be done or should be done by someone else, Mr. Speaker — what we will be doing here in this

Assembly.

In my constituency there are a few examples that I know of, and I've heard members talk about in other areas and I've heard from the Pulse Growers and I've heard from others, who talk about some very positive things that are happening.

Well, one to me that is very positive is the organic farm industry growing. The growth in this industry for the last year has been phenomenal and in the past year FarmGro started up an organic mill operation in my constituency. And I'd like to extend congratulations to them on that occasion of start-up and the operation that has continued and the advances they'll make into the future to assist farm families who're involved in organic farm initiatives.

(16:30)

And I'd like to take this opportunity to commend the RM and municipalities for working together in the Area Transportation Committee on ensuring the best transportation system is available to all of us in our areas. We have investments in transportation and the largest highway renewal program in the history of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on and I don't want to spend too much more time. But I want to very quickly say we're also looking in the areas of health and the early childhood initiatives, in the SHIN (Saskatchewan Health Information Network) and connecting rural people to specialists and health care. We're looking at the Fyke report. My constituents are very happy — they've had an opportunity to voice what they know to be ways that we could better improve delivery of quality health care in this province.

We're going to increase the number of community schools and make significant investment in renovating, expanding, and building schools. Mr. Speaker, good news, good news, good news, that the others just can't stand in this Assembly, so they have to tear down, tear down.

My educators know good news and they're also working to contribute to being an important part of expanding educational opportunities for their students. You would have heard that the Buffalo Plains School Division and their neighbouring school divisions are going to come together in amalgamation.

We listen to communities, Mr. Speaker, and to the stakeholders out there to ensure quality care for everyone in this province. We're committed to working with First Nations and Metis representatives to develop Metis and off-reserve strategies.

And I'm confident that the people of this province will endure the challenges that face us. They'll endure them together — as we've done in the past. They know that the hardships that we face strengthen us to be creative and dynamic in looking toward the future. We have a vision, we have the ideas and the creativity to make these work.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud and pleased to be able to stand here and in the days ahead work with my colleagues to make the vision outlined in the Throne from the Speech the reality.

In closing, the theme connecting to the future of prosperity couldn't be more fitting for this wonderful province of Saskatchewan. I'm proud to represent the constituency of Regina Wascana Plains, proud and thankful that you've given me this opportunity to speak to the Throne Speech today, and extremely proud later on this week to support the budget.

I am proud today to rise in support of the Throne from the Speech, Mr. Speaker, and reject the amendment that's been placed before us. Thank you.

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

## STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

### Ruling on a Question of Privilege

**The Speaker:** — At this time, I would like to interrupt the debate to bring down the ruling which I referred to earlier this afternoon.

During the debate on the Speech from the Throne on Friday, the Opposition House Leader raised a question of privilege regarding remarks by the member for Cumberland. The Deputy Speaker reserved the decision pending review of the verbatim.

This morning I received from the Opposition House Leader a formal notice of the question of privilege pursuant to rule 6, for which I thank the hon. member. The member's notice argues that the member for Cumberland is in contempt of the Assembly for falsely alleging that there are financial and other connections between official opposition members and the First Nations Party of Saskatchewan, and for comparing these connections to illegal election financing activities by the Progressive Conservative Party in Manitoba. I have now had an opportunity to review the record and consider the matter.

Before making my ruling, I remind all hon. members that it is not the role of the Speaker to decide if a breach of privilege or contempt of the Assembly has been committed. This is a question only the Assembly can decide. It is the Speaker's role to decide whether a prima facie case — which means on first sight — has been established. When a prima facie case is established, consideration of the question of privilege must then take precedence over all other business before the Assembly. The House then decides the matter by a vote.

In order for a prima facie case of privilege to be found, the actions complained of must amount to an impediment to a member's ability to carry out his or her functions as a member. It must be clearly demonstrated that a member has been obstructed or interfered with in his or her parliamentary work.

In his privilege notice, the Opposition House Leader quotes from *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* by Joseph Maingot, page 250, regarding reflections on members. Maingot goes on to say: "Any reflections of course must relate to the member's parliamentary work."

In reviewing the *Hansard*, I find that the statements made by the member for Cumberland, while they may be offensive to some, deal primarily with political party organizations. The statements do not impede the ability of any members of the

House from carrying out their duties in the Assembly. The main purpose of parliamentary privilege is to protect the member's right to free speech in the Assembly.

It follows then that Speakers should be reluctant to apply the rules of parliamentary privilege in a way that restricts members' freedom of speech. Accordingly I therefore rule that a prima facie case of privilege has not been made.

While the member for Cannington has not established a case for breach of privilege, he did underscore a long-standing practice of this Assembly. That practice is that members cannot do indirectly what cannot be done directly.

In this regard the practice of this Assembly is substantiated by the practice of the House of Commons, which is noted on page 522 of *House of Commons Practice and Procedure*.

In reviewing *Hansard* of March 23, 2001, page 95, I find that the member for Cumberland did equate the Saskatchewan Party to the Tory Party and in turn linked the Tory Party to acts that were in contravention of Manitoba's electoral laws.

The insinuation is that the Saskatchewan Party, through its alleged connection to the First Nations Party in this province, might be involved in similar illegal acts.

On page 525 of the *House of Commons Practice and Procedure*, it is stated that, quote:

a direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

I remind members that the proceedings of this Assembly are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all members. The integrity or motives of members, whether individually or collectively, should not be questioned indirectly in debate.

This was expressed in a Speaker's ruling made May 12, 2000, when a series of statements made in debate attempted to connect members of the opposition with criminal convictions. These comments were ruled out of order.

I find the words of the member for Cumberland to be similar in spirit, and thus out of order. I ask him to rise and withdraw the offending words.

**Hon. Mr. Goulet:** — I withdraw.

**The Speaker:** — Debate will proceed.

### SPECIAL ORDER

### ADJOURNED DEBATES

### ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Jones, seconded by Mr. McCall, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Hermanson.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to the Chair of this Assembly. Sir, in addition to your new, important duties, you're also my mother-in-law's MLA and so we have somewhat of a common bond, Mr. Speaker. We will both be dealing with her from time to time, and I think I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

Also through you to the member for Regina Sherwood, I'd also like to offer my congratulations to him on his selection as our Deputy Speaker. I think we have good reason to be optimistic regarding the ability and the fairness of our new officers of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this legislature deals with many wavy issues, matters of provincial import. We discuss legislation and public policy that affects the entire province. And even though this is only my second session, it strikes me that one of the most important struggles that individual MLAs face is to keep their perspective, to be ever mindful of who sent us here, to whom we are accountable, and who we represent.

I was reminded of this during last week's emergency debate on the agriculture crisis, Mr. Speaker, as I listened to my colleagues weigh in on that particular debate. And I think in particular of the members for Watrous, for Kindersley, and especially for Last Mountain-Touchwood. Clearly we were debating a very important issue that day.

The agricultural crisis is an issue that affects not only rural Saskatchewan but urban Saskatchewan. It affects every family; it affects every business across the province. It was very evident and clear, Mr. Speaker, that all of those three individuals were interested in more than a front-page headline in the province's dailies. They were looking for more than the sought after 15-second clip on a national newscast.

It was clear to me, Mr. Speaker, as I listened to them speak, and as I have listened to them in our caucus, that the agriculture issue is something very near and dear to them. They were speaking on behalf . . .

**The Speaker:** — Why is the member on his feet?

**Mr. Harper:** — To ask leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. Harper:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the member for Swift Current for allowing me this opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to all the members of the House here, a constituent of mine, Mr. Orlay Sullivan, who is sitting up in the Speaker's gallery.

Orlay is not only a constituent of mine and a good friend of mine, but he's also the best storyteller in Saskatchewan as far as I'm concerned. So I'll ask all the members to offer him a very warm welcome.

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

**SPECIAL ORDER**  
**ADJOURNED DEBATES**

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Jones, seconded by Mr. McCall, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Hermanson.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, during last week's agriculture crisis debate, those members that I mentioned were speaking out on behalf of their neighbours, their friends and families. They were speaking out on behalf of small businesses and communities in the riding. And they were talking about a way of life, Mr. Speaker.

And it was a very timely reminder for me as I began to consider what I wanted to offer in the way of my participation in the Throne Speech debate. And with those things in mind, Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with my comments as regards to the Throne Speech from the perspective of the constituents of Swift Current.

Mr. Speaker, we feel that any number of issues in the office, obviously as other members do in their constituency offices, but the number one issue that we hear about in Swift Current has to do with health care in Swift Current. The number two issue is the economy and taxes.

And so with respect to the other issues that they raise, I would like to deal in my Throne Speech . . . my address and reply to the Throne Speech, with those two issues.

Mr. Speaker, Swift Current and area used to enjoy making headlines in health care. It is after all the centre of health care region no. 1. It is the cradle of medicare, Mr. Speaker. The place in Canada — much as the revisionists across the way like to gloss over — the place in Canada where the notion that health care must be made available regardless of the availability to pay, first took root.

It's not quite like what we have now. Granted, there were still some fees, Mr. Speaker, and the relative costs of health care have skyrocketed since that time. But those surely must have been heady days in Swift Current and area as they pioneered a brand new system that would one day come to the entire country.

And decades later, Mr. Speaker, we are still making health care news in Swift Current and area. But the news has changed. Now we're making news in Swift Current because of 14 acute care bed closures in our regional hospitals. Now we're making news in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, because of six long-term care bed closures; now we hear rumours of up to eight at the hospital.

We make news in Swift Current in health care now, Mr. Speaker, because of nursing shortages. We make news now, Mr. Speaker, in Swift Current in terms of health care as a result of a deteriorating hospital that has not seen a capital improvement since 1971. We make news in Swift Current in

health care now, Mr. Speaker, because of the chronic underfunding of that district and that regional hospital by this government opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Not long ago, maybe three years ago, there was a town hall meeting in Swift Current, and that made news too, Mr. Speaker. And it was all about the doctor shortage that we face in Swift Current. Thankfully it has been alleviated to some extent — not due to anything that this government has done by the way, Mr. Speaker, but due to the efforts of the community that came together after that town hall meeting, struck a volunteer recruitment committee, and went out and found doctors for our community.

It had precious little to do with this government and everything to do with the people of Swift Current — the same people who created health care region no. 1 and medicare, are those asked in Swift Current now to fix the medicare mess left by the NDP government.

(16:45)

We make news in Swift Current in health care, Mr. Speaker, now, because of cancelled surgery, cancelled elective surgeries. And, Mr. Speaker, sadly we made news not long ago in Swift Current in terms of health care because of the blazing heat inside the air-conditioner-deprived, long-term care facilities in my community.

And as we have tried to bring these issues to the attention of the NDP government, two different NDP ministers of Health have also made health care news, and they've made a lot of heads shake in Swift Current, frankly, Mr. Speaker.

We raised concerns over bed closures with the former minister of Health in January, and her response was that it was a nursing shortage problem. They asked the district what the root of the problem was and the district said it was underfunding. They asked the nurses what the problem was; the nurses said it was underfunding.

I know, Mr. Speaker, of two nurses on a personal level who came to see me, that actually wanted and applied for full-time work in the district. But due to a lack of resources in that district provided by this government, they had to go down the road. One is working in Regina; I don't know where the other one went.

So how could it be a shortage of nurses, Mr. Speaker? Clearly that wasn't the problem.

Well last month, Mr. Speaker, constituents, patients, and doctors themselves spoke out. They were concerned by the second response that we got from a minister of this government to the crisis that we raised with them about health care in Swift Current. We raised a very similar concern about the bed closures after doctors reported in our local media that surgeries had been cancelled.

And the response we got from the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, was detailed in the February 23 edition of *The Leader Post*. This is the new minister, Mr. Speaker, the most recent Minister of Health, the member for Regina Lakeview — his

quote, and I'm quoting from the newspaper. First of all the headline, Mr. Speaker, and it is a headline, says: "Nilson denies health crisis," and I'm quoting.

Then he goes on in the article and he says:

"I am very disappointed by my colleague from the Saskatchewan Party who continues to use examples like this (the bed closures and the attendant issues with those) as a method of raising the fear of the public.

"What we know in that health district is that over . . . three or four years the occupancy rate in the hospital . . . there is about (60) . . . per cent.

So basically everything is fine; that's the upshot of this article. The minister said that in the Swift Current district — everything is fine.

Well, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the hon. member for Regina Qu'Appelle says it's reading between the line. The headline speaks for itself — he denies the crisis, he denies the crisis in Swift Current.

And what was the response, what was the response of the doctors? Mr. Speaker, in our constituency in Swift Current, who in the very next edition of *The Southwest Booster*, our weekly, basically the doctor in particular, the doctor that heads up the General Practitioners' Association in Swift Current said in no uncertain terms that what the minister was denying was this: he was denying the fact that bed closures at the Swift Current hospital have resulted in a couple of things in addition to the cancelled surgeries.

It's resulted in maternity patients, new mothers, getting the bum's rush out of their ward because maternity beds are needed for acute care. It's meant that babies are going home before the nursing staff would like them to go home, Mr. Speaker, because they need the beds for acute care.

It means that people who need acute care medical beds in Swift Current are being shuffled out of the system before they should be because long-term care patients are also taking up medical beds in the hospital. And why is that? Because this government's actions caused the closure of long-term care beds in my community, Mr. Speaker.

The minister denies that there's a problem with that. He denies that there's a problem with that in Swift Current and across the province. I'd submit, with respect to the hon. member through you, that there is a problem with that. There's a problem when the basic tenets of the Canada Health Act are being violated in Swift Current and across the province day in and day out as a result of this government's underfunding, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the health care crisis in Swift Current is real. They say that we are fearmongering and their tired, old refrain is that we are purveyors of doom and gloom. And so we look at the Throne Speech for some hope, Mr. Speaker. But we don't find it there.

And we ask, through you, we ask them the question. Is it fearmongering to raise the plight of an 80-year-old blind

woman who's about to be moved . . . who was about to be moved from her long-term care bed until we were able to intervene? That is closing, that bed is closing, and they wanted her to move either back to the hospital to a much-needed medical bed or to a facility 30 miles west of Swift Current.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I can't describe how shocking it was to hear the family of that lady describe her situation to me. And it didn't take long for me to recognize who this lady was.

I recollect door knocking during the 1999 campaign, and I came to her home and she invited me in. It was a hot night and she asked if I wanted a drink of water and I was very grateful for that. And we sat down and we had a long chat about issues. She was living very independently at the time, Mr. Speaker. So much so that she had to tell me, 10 minutes into our conversation, she had to tell me that she was actually blind, that she couldn't see.

And so imagine my shock when I put two and two together when her family was in my office all these months later, that it was this very same lady. Some medical catastrophe had befallen her, and so she had to now be admitted to a long-term care bed. And they told me that it was very difficult for her because she had basically lived so independently all those years in her house.

And so here's this wonderful lady — this 80-year-old lady, pioneer of our province — trying to make the very difficult adjustment of moving from her independent home on 13th Avenue in Swift Current to a long-term care bed. And the next news she gets — thanks to this government — the next news that she gets is that they're going to close that bed or they need her long-term care bed, and that she should be moved back to the hospital or maybe 30 miles down the road.

Mr. Speaker, is it fear mongering to raise her plight, to try to get some justice for her? Or what about the story in . . . last summer, Mr. Speaker, at the Swift Current Care Centre. I remember it was a Sunday afternoon last — I think it was last July — and we received a call, Mr. Speaker, to our home.

**The Speaker:** — Order, order.

**Mr. Wall:** — We received a call at our home, Mr. Speaker, from the nursing staff at the Swift Current Care Centre. It was in the middle of a heat wave in Swift Current, and they asked if we could just come down and check it out. They didn't know where to turn. They knew we couldn't fix it immediately or do something about it, but would we come down and check out the situation?

And so my wife, Tami, and I, we drove down to the care centre and we were met at the door by nurses who were just absolutely perspiring from the work that they had done all day. And they brought us over to the eating area where most of the residents of the long-term care facility were. They were . . . while they were supposed to be eating, but none really were because of the heat. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure it had zapped their appetite.

And then they asked me to come over and take a look at the digital thermostat on the wall at this care centre, understanding that the eating area was the coolest room in the facility, and it

was 33.9 degrees in that eating area for these long-term care residents. There were fans going everywhere.

As we toured the facility we noticed there weren't even proper blinds on the windows. There were basically bed . . . you know, thin, cotton bedsheet-like curtains that basically were heat conductors as opposed to deflectors.

And so in that case, Mr. Speaker, we simply asked the government of the day, we wrote a letter saying, is it too much to consider portable air conditioners? They have that technology now. They're relatively inexpensive. Is it too much to consider that as an option, as an alternative? And there was no answer that came back.

So when the heat wave hits again next summer, the situation will have changed . . . will not have changed at all. Senior citizens, people who built our province, will be forced to endure 33 degree heat in their long-term care facility that their taxes and the taxes of their family members have paid for. That's the kind of service that seniors will be able to expect because of this government, Mr. Speaker, and the chronic underfunding of health care in the Swift Current area.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government has broken the promise of health care region no. 1. They have betrayed the very authors of the medicare system that they falsely claim as their exclusive heritage. Their broken promises, their excuses, their ridiculous chants from the backbench meant to marginalize these serious concerns are absolutely unacceptable. And so, Mr. Speaker, I looked to the Throne Speech for some indication in the Throne Speech, that while we await Fyke, interim measures will be taken to deal with emergent issues, not just in Swift Current but across the province.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Throne Speech is completely silent on any such measure. For those in Swift Current waiting for some relief from this health care crisis — that the Minister of Health denies — there is nothing in the Throne Speech that would give them hope.

Next to health care, Mr. Speaker, my constituency office deals with the deep and abiding concerns about taxes in the overall economy. And make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, the people in Swift Current and area have put the two together. They understand that in order to have a strong and a growing economy, you need to do it on the foundation of sustained lowering of taxes. You need the lowest taxes possible, in order to compete with the jurisdictions across this country. Not just with Alberta, but other provinces as well.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Swift Current has always felt that the competitive pressures . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. members . . . the hon. members are yelling from the . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order, order.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Speaker, the hon. members are yelling from their seat. Underscoring again for anyone that can hear and for those that can't, I'll repeat what I was saying. Underscoring once again, for everybody, that they simply don't understand how it is you can have sustained health care and social services

in our province or any other jurisdiction.

You need people to pay taxes, you need businesses to pay taxes, families with the money in their pocket to pay taxes. It's the only way. It doesn't come out of mid-air. The hon. member for Regina South doesn't understand that these things don't appear out of mid-air. It's all based on small-business men and women, large businesses too, and families with the ability to pay taxes; lower taxes, mind you, than what we pay now, but taxes nonetheless, Mr. Speaker.

We'll continue to explain it. I doubt that they'll understand it, Mr. Speaker, and it's why we'll soon be trading places, Mr. Speaker, because they don't understand that basic issue.

Mr. Speaker, Swift Current has always felt the competitive pressures of living so close to not just Alberta, but we live close to the lowest-cost community within Alberta in terms of paying taxes and utility fees. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the member for CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan), when we're asking about issues that relate to the energy crisis that we're having right now, often cites Alberta and deregulation in terms of a reason to not go down that road, and he may be right.

But what the minister fails to recognize is that two hours down the road from Swift Current is the city of Medicine Hat. Their gas prices are half the price of ours, even with deregulation. Their electrical costs are much lower than ours. Their property taxes are very much lower than ours. But the energy bills that they are paying, Mr. Speaker, in Medicine Hat are half the costs that we're paying here, in a deregulated environment. That is what Swift Current has to compete with, Mr. Speaker. So we understand, we understand the need to be able to compete with Alberta.

But lately, Mr. Speaker, our economic situation has become much more urgent. What has been very alarming for me and other people in my hometown and the surrounding area is the number of long-term Swift Current residents, many of them entrepreneurs and job creators, who have chosen to leave our city. Too many men and women who have the investment ability and the skill and the proven track record of creating jobs and economic development have left; and many others are sitting at their kitchen tables or at their office desks — where they used to plan business strategies, sadly, Mr. Speaker — they're planning exit strategies today.

I have talked to so many accountants in my hometown, Mr. Speaker, who feel bad for having done their fiduciary duty to their clients. They tell me they have clients considering selling out and getting out of business. And they tell me that they regret having to perform their fiduciary duty to those clients when they tell them, you know, before you sell out, you should get a mailing address, you should maybe move to Medicine Hat, because the taxes here are so punitive.

And many of those people, Mr. Speaker, are the kinds of people who after selling out of their current business would like to invest it in a new business, would like to create more jobs, and now they will be doing that in Medicine Hat. It is lost to the city of Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, because they've decided to do that in Medicine Hat. And I have much more to say, Mr.



Speaker . . .

**The Speaker:** — Order. It now being past the hour of 5 o'clock, this House will recess until 7 p.m. tonight.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.

