

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people in Swift Current and across southwest Saskatchewan who are concerned about the hospital, the regional hospital in Swift Current.

And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners will 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.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by people from Swift Current, Lancer, Waldeck, Herbert, McMahon, Wymark, Neville, and Neidpath, Mr. Speaker.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the good citizens of Weyburn-Big Muddy constituency who are concerned about maintaining ambulance service in their area.

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 the prayer is signed by the good citizens of Viceroy.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of the citizens of Assiniboia.

And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure that, at the very least, current levels of services and care are maintained at Pioneer Lodge in Assiniboia.

And as is duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And the petitioners come from Assiniboia, Limerick, Wood Mountain, and Crane Valley.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

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

Opposition to the centralization of ambulance services; and

A request for a new hospital in Swift Current.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Ms. Lorjé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to all members of the Assembly and to the province, I would like to introduce very many individuals who are seated in the galleries. Mr. Speaker, these visitors are Saskatchewan volunteers.

Today the Premier and I had the pleasure of unveiling Saskatchewan's pin to celebrate the International Year of Volunteers this year. And these many individuals came on behalf of the following organizations to observe that unveiling.

We have representatives today here from the Salvation Army, both from Regina and across the province; from the Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services; the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Regina branch; St. Augustine community school here in Regina; Sask Sport; the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation; the Sask Sports Hall of Fame & Museum; the MacKenzie Art Gallery; IODE (Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire), Pasqua Hospital auxiliary, Santa Maria hospital . . . or Santa Maria auxiliary, I'm sorry.

And last but not least — and I hope I haven't missed any organizations; if I have, I apologize, and I'm sure that other members will correct my errors — but last but not least, we have representatives here from the Saskatchewan Division of the Canadian Cancer Society. And they were the recipients of the first of 12,800 pins for their very many volunteers across the province.

The guests, Mr. Speaker, will order pins on behalf of their organizations to distribute to their volunteers and, in total, they will be giving away 450,000 pins this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hope you don't consider this as a prop, but as you know, each and every one of us, I'm sure, in this Assembly came to our elected positions by virtue of the volunteer work that we did in our home communities. And so I would ask you if you could have one of the pages come and distribute a pin to each member of the Assembly.

And I would ask that all members join with me in welcoming these fine and many volunteers. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I thank the hon. member, and with leave of

the Assembly, we'll have the pins distributed.

Leave granted.

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the official opposition we too would like to welcome the volunteers that are here today and recognize your valuable contribution to our communities. You truly are the backbone that makes Saskatchewan work and we're proud to have you here. And again, welcome on behalf of the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Role of the School Task Force Report Released

Mr. McCall: — Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to creating a society that benefits all of its members. And without a doubt, education plays a crucial role in making this happen.

Yesterday I attended the release of the final report of the Role of the School Task Force and I was inspired and excited by what Dr. Tymchak and the task force have brought together.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend and congratulate the task force on their excellent work, and on this day before the budget, I would also like to state my support for the strong indication given yesterday by Minister Melenchuk that this report will not be sitting on the shelf.

I would also like to commend the task force for drawing so much inspiration from the motto of the community schools approach to education. This approach brings people together around their schools to build — what else? — stronger, better communities.

Community schools were first established in the early 1980s by the Blakeney government. One such school was Kitchener Elementary in north central Regina. It was entirely fitting then, Mr. Speaker, that Kitchener was chosen as the site of yesterday's announcement. And I have first-hand knowledge of the excellent community school education to be gained there because I am a proud graduate of Kitchener Community School.

So let me also extend my congratulations to the staff and students of Kitchener for being such wonderful hosts and for serving as an inspiration for the future of education in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I believe I heard the member refer to a member by name rather than the proper title or constituency. I'll check the record. But would the member please be aware of that.

Emergency Services Building in Gull Lake Opened

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, March 1, I had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of the Emergency Services Building in Gull Lake. This

facility was initiated by the town of Gull Lake, the village of Carmichael, and by the surrounding rural municipalities of Gull Lake, Webb, and Carmichael, as well.

There were major corporate donations to help underfund some of this. And a substantial contribution came from the Centenary Fund, for which I am grateful on behalf of those communities.

Six local contractors and eight out-of-town contractors provided services for the construction of this new facility.

Local dignitaries, Howard Wedrick, the project chairman; Cecil Dutton, councillor for the RM (rural municipality) of Gull Lake; and Ken Wiebe, the mayor of Gull Lake as well as Dennis Fiddler, the reeve of the RM of Webb, and Blake Campbell, the CEO (chief executive officer) for the Gull Lake ambulance service, acknowledged the many hours of volunteer labour involved in bringing this fine project to fruition.

Kevin McEown, the fire prevention officer from the Fire Commissioner's office in Saskatoon, was on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. And following that there was a tour of the building and viewing of equipment by the individuals in attendance.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very encouraged to witness the co-operation and concerted efforts of many people who made this project possible. And I am certain the emergency services available to the communities surrounding Gull Lake will be further enhanced because of this project.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Greenhouse Gas Technology Centre

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think most of us in the House were somewhat concerned this morning when we learned that the American President had said that the US (United States) will do nothing to further their participation in Kyoto and the agreements that we have signed to reduce greenhouse gases.

He uses as the argument for this, that they will not do anything to harm their economy.

On this side we know, Mr. Speaker, that you cannot have a healthy economy without having a healthy environment. And as such I am particularly pleased to reiterate the commitment that our government has made to the creation of a new greenhouse gas technology centre to be opened at the University of Regina's campus in the next couple of years.

Mr. Speaker, this centre will serve as a place for partnership between the federal government, provincial government, academics, and business in terms of working for ways to reduce the harmful emissions.

Clearly Saskatchewan's economy is dependent upon petrochemicals and our extraction of oil and natural gas. We understand the impact that these fossil fuels do have on the economy when they are used, and as such, we are particularly pleased to see that we are working towards ways to mitigate, to mitigate the impact of these, these fossil fuels on our, on our

environment.

This will be one of the pre-eminent centres for developing greenhouse gas technology into the future. And the centre will make a major global contribution to the critical environment and economic challenges we face.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Avonlea Hockey Team Wins Provincial Title

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, the Avonlea Prairie Thunder midget girls' hockey team defeated the Regina Sharks recently 3 to 2 in double overtime to become SHA (Saskatchewan Hockey Association) Senior B provincial champs.

The Avonlea girls will now represent Saskatchewan in the Western Canadian Shield to be held April 6 to 8 in Regina including teams representing the four western provinces and the territories.

The team is coached by Mr. Wayne Watson and Mr. Brad Mohr. The manager is Carol Holland and trainer, Carol Hubbard.

Avonlea Prairie Thunder have been league champs the last three years and this is their second provincial championship. Congratulations to the Avonlea Prairie Thunder, their coaches, manager, and trainer, and good luck as they represent Saskatchewan in the Western Canadian Shield.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Athletes Win Sask Sport Awards

Ms. Junor: — I'm proud to acknowledge the accomplishments of two exceptional athletes from my constituency of Saskatoon Eastview. At the recent 2000 Sask Sport Athletes of the Year award banquet, Howard West won the Master Athlete award.

Mr. West has set several indoor and outdoor records. An example of some of the sports Mr. West has excelled in are shot put, javelin, weight throw, hammer and discus.

At the Canadian Master Championships Mr. West won five gold and three silver medals. At the World Association of Veteran Athletes and Pan Am Championships, he won three gold medals, two silver medals and a bronze.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. West is a remarkable 87 years old and an inspiration to all of us to get active.

The second athlete I want to congratulate is Jean-Pierre Sequin. Jean-Pierre, a 15-year-old fencing champion, was a finalist for the youth male award. He is currently ranked first in Canada in cadet men's epee and second in junior men's epee.

Both Howard West and Jean-Pierre Sequin are shining examples of athletic excellence.

I ask all members to join with me in congratulating my

constituents and all the other fine athletes who were finalists and winners in their categories at the awards banquet.

Watrous Farm Dealership Wins Award

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Barry Nelson from the John Deere Marketing Centre in Lenexa, Kansas, recently informed Brad Westby that Westby Tractor and Equipment Ltd. of Watrous has been named winner of the prestigious John Deere Performance Excellence Dealership award.

The annual award is based on excellence in customer satisfaction, market coverage and operational performance. Verle Hearn, manager of dealer development at the John Deere market centre said, this is a significant accomplishment and demonstrates this dealership's commitment to its customers, its employees and John Deere.

Less than 20 per cent of John Deere's independent North American dealerships meet the criteria to be eligible to receive this award.

I would like everyone to join me in congratulating Brad on this outstanding accomplishment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Doctors

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New doctors are calling Shaunavon, Saskatchewan home, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Ivo Radenski arrived in Shaunavon February 2nd of this year, and opened his practice at the local medical clinic on February 5th.

Meanwhile another physician was also beginning work in Shaunavon, Saskatchewan. Dr. Wassefall is set to join Dr. Vogel at the Shaunavon Medical Clinic in the middle of February. Dr. Vogel was tight-pressed being the only doctor in town. The addition of these two new doctors will benefit the rural community greatly.

(13:45)

Dr. Vogel was recently honoured during a chamber of commerce annual general meeting for his great commitment to the Shaunavon community.

No matter how you look at it, Mr. Speaker, the addition of these two new doctors in Shaunavon, along with two other new doctors in Rosetown, is good news for the province of Saskatchewan.

Our health care system is strong and thriving, Mr. Speaker, and we have committed to keep it that way.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Tax Provisions in Budget

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is

for the Minister of Finance. The minister is dropping some very disturbing hints about tomorrow's budget. In spite of a surplus of hundreds of millions of dollars, it sounds like none of that money will be going back to Saskatchewan people in the form of personal tax cuts.

The minister says there will be no cut in the gas tax, no cut in the NDP's (New Democratic Party) expanded PST (provincial sales tax), and no further reduction in income tax. In other words, no tax cuts for Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister really believe he's gone far enough in cutting personal taxes. What tax relief will taxpayers see in tomorrow's budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, tomorrow I will stand in my place and I will deliver this government's new budget. And that budget, Mr. Speaker, will be a message of hope and optimism to the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And the reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is because we on this side of the House believe in our province. We love to live in Saskatchewan, we believe we have a tremendous future, and we have confidence in our future, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — That member will continue to spread his gospel of doom and gloom, Mr. Speaker. That's what he will do.

What we will do, Mr. Speaker, is provide the people of Saskatchewan with a positive vision of the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That response is certainly disappointing. The minister obviously thinks he's done enough. His verbal dexterity is frightening because while he's patting himself on the back with one hand, he's reaching into taxpayers' pockets with the other.

Last year's income tax cut was wiped out by the PST increase. This year's income tax cut will be wiped out by higher SaskPower and SaskEnergy bills. And there's more increases on the way.

So while the minister's bank account is filling up with record oil revenues — and maybe that's why he's in such a good mood — the NDP is leaving with Saskatchewan families less and less money in their bank account, and maybe that's why they're so upset.

Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Finance really believe that he's gone far enough in cutting personal taxes. Why is he refusing to give some of the surplus that he has back to Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is wondering why I'm in a good mood. I am in a good mood because I enjoy living in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And I've got news for the member from Rosetown-Biggar, the leader of the so-called Saskatchewan Party — I think it's really the anti-Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker.

And the news I've got for the member from Rosetown-Biggar is this. The sky is not falling, Mr. Speaker. People are working. Unemployment is low. Taxes are coming down. And we have a tremendous future, Mr. Speaker.

Now I know that's very disappointing to the member opposite because most people, Mr. Speaker, are too busy working to listen to his message of doom and gloom and his Stockwell Day-inspired, voodoo snake oil economics, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's astounding to believe that this government actually thinks . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Members will allow the member to put his question. The member for Canora-Pelly, will you start over.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's astounding to believe that this government actually thinks that it has cut taxes enough. This only shows how out of touch the NDP really is with Saskatchewan people.

Last month the Saskatchewan Party caucus conducted a poll. We asked Saskatchewan people if they thought the NDP is doing enough to cut taxes or should it be doing more. Over two-thirds — 68 per cent — said the government should be doing more.

Saskatchewan people are almost evenly split on whether the government should be cutting the PST, the income tax, or gas tax. But the message is clear — the government must do more.

The income tax reductions they have delivered to date are being swallowed up by the higher PST costs, higher SaskEnergy bills, higher SaskPower bills, higher property taxes. The government must do more.

Mr. Speaker, did the minister get that message? Will he share the surplus with Saskatchewan families by cutting taxes in tomorrow's budget?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the member from Canora-Pelly, in his effort to bail out the Leader of the Opposition, starts talking about polls.

I'll tell the member where the latest poll was taken, Mr. Speaker. The latest poll, where the Leader of the Opposition was talking about taxes, was in the constituency of Saskatoon Riversdale. And the result of that poll, Mr. Speaker, was that the people of Saskatoon Riversdale resoundingly rejected the voodoo, doom and gloom, Stockwell-Day-inspired, snake oil economics of the Leader of the Opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And while I'm on my feet, I want to say this too, I'm reading from the *Carlyle Observer* and the editorial of March 26 says and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

Calvert on top of the game.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know what, Mr. Speaker, haven't seen any editorials that say the Leader of the Opposition is at the top of his game and I don't think we're going to see any, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think we're starting to see a clear difference between the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party. The NDP . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. The member may start over.

Mr. Krawetz: — And, I want to point out that difference. When the NDP gets a surplus, they think it's their money. The Saskatchewan Party believes it's the taxpayers' money.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — And it should go back to the taxpayers through tax cuts. That's the difference, Mr. Speaker. And that's why the NDP are in no hurry to cut taxes.

Last year's tax cut is gone. It was swallowed up by the expanded PST. This year's tax cut is also gone, swallowed up by skyrocketing utility rates. And tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, we're going to see a government that has socked hundreds of millions of dollars away into its bank account, while the bank accounts of Saskatchewan families get smaller and smaller.

Mr. Minister, why won't you give taxpayers a break? Why are you padding your bank account at the expense of taxpayers' bank accounts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would just ask the member to observe rule 28 in phrasing his questions through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, as usual with their voodoo economics, the opposition is complaining because this government operates at a surplus.

Of course it's confusing and perplexing to the members opposite because they've never created a surplus in their lives, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And you know, what I find really curious, Mr. Speaker, about the Leader of Opposition is this. As I said the other day, we were at a meeting of the Regina Chamber of Commerce on January 29. I was there, the Leader of the Opposition there, the member from I think it's Indian Head-Wolseley was there.

The Regina Chamber of Commerce talked about the tax cuts that we've had — income tax, that are continuing — that will have a positive effect on the economy, on jobs, opportunity, and growth.

You know what the Leader of the Opposition did, Mr. Speaker? He sat there and said nothing because he didn't want to contradict the chamber of commerce in the face of the facts, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Assiniboia Pioneer Lodge

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Last night I was in Assiniboia for a town meeting. Mr. Speaker, 350 people showed up to let the government know what they think of the NDP's plan to close long-term care beds at the Pioneer Lodge facility and turn it into more office space for some of their 800 new bureaucrats.

Mr. Speaker, I was there, 350 local residents were there, the district health board was there. Guess how many NDP ministers were there? None. How many health department staff showed up there? None. That's right, Mr. Speaker. None.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Assiniboia have a question for the Health minister: why is the NDP forcing seniors out of the Pioneer Lodge so they can build more office space for bureaucrats?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is accessible, public-funded health care. And we're going to continue to build on that plan as we move into the future.

What happens in our system now is that the districts work with the local communities to assess their needs and work on the various requirements that are there. What we know is that last night at the meeting, the local district administration and the board people talked with the community, heard their concerns; and this is part of a planned discussion with the people in that area as they assess their needs.

I'm informed that the member opposite also understands that people aren't being forced to go anywhere, this is a voluntary

process, and that this is something that is being done together with the community. That's how we work — as team members with our community because we want to build a better health system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear the minister say he wants to work with the people to build a better system, but unfortunately he doesn't even come down to a meeting to talk to the people.

Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Health minister. If he would have taken the time to come to Assiniboia last night, he would have heard from the people about what they're thinking of the Pioneer Lodge and the plan to force the people out. They think that the NDP plan stinks. But the minister wouldn't know because he wasn't there — no Health minister, no Rural Revitalization minister, and no NDP MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly). So much for connecting with rural Saskatchewan.

However, Mr. Speaker, however, my question for the minister is this: will the Health minister demonstrate that he's listening to the people of Assiniboia by announcing today that he won't force seniors out of their homes at Pioneer Lodge to free up space for more office?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, we have a clear demonstration here of one of the difficulties with the questions we get from the members opposite. And that's the fact that they do not listen to the answer that's given the first time around, and they don't step away from the text that's been prepared a few hours ago.

The local community is working together with the health district board and administration to define what is the appropriate levels of care in their community. People are not being forced out of this institution; they are working together at what are the various options to use the various facilities that are in that particular health district.

We, on this side of the House, trust our health districts and those people who work there to make some of these decisions with the local people. And that's why we will not micromanage, which is clearly the position of those people across there in their documents, but not in their actions.

So what I would say, Mr. Speaker, is let us allow the local people to make the decisions that help do the things they need to do in their areas.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure who doesn't understand the question or who's not understanding the answers.

The people of Assiniboia are the ones that are being affected by

this decision. The people of Assiniboia will tell you that their people are being forced out of the long-term care home. That's why I asked the minister if he would commit to not having the people forced out. However I don't think the minister understands the question or he doesn't care about the plan to clear the seniors out.

So I'll try asking the Premier a question. Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised to reconnect with rural Saskatchewan by getting on a bus and driving about the province. Well apparently the keys are lost or he's afraid to put the bus on the roads down there in case it might be wrecked.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Premier is this; why is he and his government avoiding the people of Assiniboia while the district health board does the NDP's dirty work of forcing seniors out of their homes to make room for more bureaucrats? Why is the Premier doing this?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Well point number one, Mr. Speaker, this opposition can't have it both ways. They can't have a circumstance where they say that the Government of Saskatchewan — in their brief to the Fyke Commission, they say in their brief — that the Government of Saskatchewan can't be micromanaging the health care system, this decision shouldn't be made in Regina. Then, Mr. Speaker, they come into this House and tell the Minister of Health that he should be micromanaging the system.

The fact of the matter is this, Mr. Speaker. The district health board in south country is working through their process. They're working with the community and they'll make the right decisions for their communities and we'll support their decisions.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member from Wood River has some question about my bus. Well I'll tell you this, Mr. Speaker, my bus started rolling — my bus started rolling — in Elphinstone, and then it rolled through Riversdale, and it's coming to your place soon.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mandate of Rural Revitalization Department

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

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The member will start again please.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise to me that this NDP government couldn't spare the time to attend the meeting in Assiniboia last night because that's their record. Over 350 people concerned over the loss of their long-term care home were not important enough for the Minister of Health to attend.

They weren't important enough for the Premier to attend or for him to even send a representative. Mr. Speaker, this is the same Premier that said he wanted to reconnect with rural Saskatchewan so he set up a new department.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Saskatchewan have been calling the minister responsible for the new Department of Rural Revitalization and they want to know, what is the mandate of this department? Madam Minister, will you explain your mandate to the people of Saskatchewan today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I would just ask the member to observe Rule 28 and to put his question through the Chair.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can assure the members opposite is that the office of Rural Revitalization has now appointed a deputy minister, Harvey Brooks. Harvey Brooks has vast experience not only in this province but across Canada in the area of rural development and rural policy.

What I can tell the member is that the Department of Rural Revitalization will not have a huge bureaucracy. The mandate of the department will be to work with communities to promote rural economic development in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjørnerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, today the Premier announced this new department and the department has been advertising for staff and they'll have an office in downtown Regina. That is real rural revitalization, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the people out in rural Saskatchewan want to know what this department is actually going to do for them. Mr. Speaker, will this replace SEDCO (Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation)? Will it replace SOCO (Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation)? Will it take over for the ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) Committee? What is it going to do for rural Saskatchewan? People, Mr. Speaker, in rural Saskatchewan are tired of this government dumping on them and they want to know.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell us today what actually are you going to do for people in rural Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell the member is that the Department of Rural Revitalization is going to work with rural residents to focus government's attention on rural economic development. The department is going to work with various agencies, businesses, Crown corporations, and other government departments to provide rural residents with a focus on rural economic development.

What I can also tell the member is we are not going to do as his predecessors did and have a quote, "Fair Share Saskatchewan", which was totally ridiculous.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Moratorium on Closure of Health Care Facilities

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, last year the government gave its commitment there would be no — I repeat, no — closures to hospital beds or long-term care facility beds pending the report of Fyke, pending a complete review of our health care system, a complete and total moratorium on all further closures by the NDP.

My question for the Minister of Health: has that commitment been thrown out the window? Is that commitment still alive? Do you still stand by it? Do you still stand by your word or is it gone?

The Speaker: — I would ask all members of the House to please phrase their questions according to rule 28, through the Chair.

Hon. Mr. Nilson: — Mr. Speaker, the commitment around the facilities not being closed during this time of discussion remains. We are continuing to work with the communities and also look at the overall situation. What we know is that we want to have the best, accessible, publicly funded system that we can have, but we also recognize that we have to do that within the funds that we have.

That's a major task that we're going to be doing. But at this point the commitment is still there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crown Corporations' Investment Plans

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, on October 24 the Leader of the Opposition said that the government plans to invest \$500 million — that's half a billion dollars — outside the province of Saskatchewan through the province's Crown corporations. To date, the NDP has refused to either confirm or deny that half billion dollar figure.

My question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Crown Investments: is that figure correct? Is it a half billion dollars of Saskatchewan taxpayers' and utility users' money you intend on investing outside Saskatchewan? Is that the figure? Will you come clean with the people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly do want to point out again, Mr. Speaker, that our Crown corporations employ over 10,000 people in this province, Mr. Speaker. Our Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, on average spend close to a billion dollars a year in this province employing people and buying goods and services in this province.

Mr. Speaker, with de-regulation that's taken place in this province and across this country, if that member who sat as a member of Crown Investments Corporations Board, believes that the borders should be closed and allow people to come in and take people's money from Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and not allow our Crown corporations to earn revenue from other provinces and other parts of the country, then that member has his head screwed on wrong, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Speaker, maybe I did have trouble with my head where it was screwed on, but that's why I moved.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — But I say to him, I find it incomprehensibly arrogant — indeed, I find it unfathomable — that this government refuses to tell the people of Saskatchewan if they're investing half a billion of their money outside the province of Saskatchewan.

Do the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, have the right to know what's happening to their money? I ask the Minister of Crown Investments: why the stonewalling? Why won't he come clean with the people of Saskatchewan? Why doesn't he think the people of Saskatchewan have a right to know where their money is going? What countries? Where? What's the plan? Do the shareholders of these Crown corporations have that right or not?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — A very interesting question, Mr. Speaker, from a member who sat on the Crown Investments Corporation Board. I find this incredible.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at rates charged by other companies, Mr. Speaker — private utility across Canada and in Western Canada — rates on utilities, rates for electricity, rates for natural gas, I suggest that that member believes, Mr. Speaker, that we should sell the Crowns. It sounds to me like he's saying we should sell the Crowns.

No sense, Mr. Speaker. As somebody who sat on the Crown Investments Board, he should know, Mr. Speaker, that our Crown corporations need to remain vital, they need to remain strong, and the people of Saskatchewan want our Crowns, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Crown Investments Corporation in Saskatchewan and our Crowns certainly, absolutely — let me clarify this categorically — will earn revenues outside of the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 6 — The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 6, The Planning and Development Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read for the first time.

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

Bill No. 7 — The Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2001

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 7, The

Superannuation (Supplementary Provisions) Amendment Act, 2001 be now introduced and read the first time.

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

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask leave of the Assembly to move a motion in regards to the reappointment of Ken Acton as member of the Public and Private Rights Board.

Leave granted.

MOTIONS

Public and Private Rights Board Appointment

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Acton has been a member of the Public and Private Rights Board since July 1, 1990 in his capacity as director of mediation services branch of the Department of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, this arrangement has proven to be very useful. The primary function of both the mediation services branch and the Public and Private Rights Board is dispute resolutions pursuant to The Expropriation Procedure Act.

The Public and Private Rights Board has the authority to review matters relating to the expropriation of land or the intention to acquire land by expropriating authorities in an effort to help the parties reach mutually acceptable solutions.

Landowners may request the board to review either or both of the following: the route situation or design of a public improvement and the amount of compensation offered for the expropriated land.

As a consequence of the similar action of the board and mediation services, the reappointment of Ken Acton as member of the board is appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

As director of mediation services branch, Mr. Acton has extensive experience in dispute resolution. He's recognized by his peers throughout Canada and the United States for the leadership role he's taken in the field of dispute resolution.

May I say, Mr. Speaker, in my dealings with Mr. Acton he's a most impressive public servant and we're very lucky to have him. And he's from Moose Jaw, Mr. Speaker.

(14:15)

Mr. Acton's experience has ensured that landowners who face expropriation have access to an enhanced model of dispute resolution. His background in administration has facilitated the effective administration of the board. His work with expropriating parties to encourage them to adopt a more collaborative approach has decreased the number of complaints received by the board.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore move, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow:

That our humble address be presented to Her Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, recommending that Kenneth W. Acton of the city of Moose Jaw, in the province of Saskatchewan, be reappointed as a member of the Public and Private Rights Board, effective April 15, 2001, for a term of five years, pursuant to section 6 of The Expropriation Procedure Act.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, I'd like to move several motions regarding the membership of committees.

Leave is granted.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Communication**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Deb Higgins be substituted for that of Mr. Kim Trew on the list of members composing the Standing Committee on Communication.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Names on
Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move again, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the names of Mr. Ron Osika and Ms. Janice MacKinnon be substituted for that of Mr. Jack Hillson and Mr. Myron Kowalsky on a list of members comprising of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Names on
Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I'd move as well, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That the names of Mr. Ron Harper and Ms. Judy Junor be substituted for that of Ms. Pat Lorjé and Mr. Kim Trew on our list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move as well, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Judy Junor be substituted for that of

Mr. Myron Kowalsky on the list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Private Members' Bills.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Non-Controversial Bills**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Judy Junor be substituted for that of Mr. Myron Kowalsky on the list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Non-Controversial Bills.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — I move as well, and seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Janice MacKinnon be substituted for that of Mr. Kim Trew on the list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Names on the
Special Committee on Nominating**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move as well, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That the names of Mr. Eldon Lautermilch and Ms. Deb Higgins be substituted for that of Mr. Dwain Lingenfelter and Mr. Lindy Kasperski on a list of members comprising the Special Committee on Nominating.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Crown Corporations**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move as well, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Mr. Warren McCall be substituted for that of Mr. Ron Harper on the list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Education**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move as well, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the member Ms. Judy Junor be substituted for that of Mr. Myron Kowalsky on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Education.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Names on
Special Committee on Rules and Procedures**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the names of Mr. Ron Osika and Ms. Judy Junor be substituted for that of Mr. Jack Hillson and Mr. Myron Kowalsky on a list of members comprising the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Names on
Continuing Select Committee**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the names of Mr. Kevin Yates and Mr. Eldon Lautermilch be substituted for that of Mr. Myron Kowalsky and Mr. Dwain Lingenfelter on a list of members comprising the Continuing Select Committee.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Municipal Law**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Mr. Warren McCall be substituted for that of Mr. Kim Trew on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Municipal Law.

Motion agreed to.

**Substitution of Name on
Standing Committee on Agriculture**

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded, by the member from Saskatoon Nutana:

That the name of Ms. Pat Atkinson be substituted for that of Mr. Dwain Lingenfelter on a list of members comprising the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

The Speaker: — Now before Orders of the Day, members, I wish to table in accordance with the Board of Internal Economy directive 22(1)(g), the members' accountability and disclosure statements for the year ended March 31, 2000, and in accordance with directive 23(1)(c), I also table the audited financial statements for each caucus for the year ended March 31, 2000.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being an open and accountable government, we are very pleased to table the answer to the question.

The Speaker: — The answer to question no. 1 is tabled.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATE

ADDRESS IN REPLY

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

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I entered into the debate on the Throne Speech yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I was attempting to illustrate that the NDP's characterization of the official opposition as the party of doom and gloom was really nothing more than a feeble attempt to explain away the frustration that we, that our constituents, and that the people of Saskatchewan feel about the way that they have governed this province for the better part of the last 50 years.

I talked a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about the frustration that they feel around the fact that there is absolutely no plan for improving the highway system in this province. I talked a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about the frustration . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Goulet: — Mr. Speaker, in the Speaker's gallery is Winston McKay from Cumberland House who has done some marathon canoe paddling, Mr. Speaker, and he's also been a Liberal candidate in regards to the elections in Cumberland constituency.

So I'll ask guests to recognize Mr. McKay.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Why is the member from Regina Elphinstone on his feet?

Mr. McCall: — To introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

Mr. McCall: — In the opposite gallery, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Messrs. Matt de Vleiger and Shane Corkery. They're scions of Saskatchewan and they bring our province glory and honour, across this nation and around the world. And I'm glad

to see them here. Please welcome them today, folks.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Hillson: — Yes, Mr. Speaker. With leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Winston McKay to the legislature this afternoon. A strong advocate for Aboriginal people, a strong advocate for the North, and I wish him all the best in witnessing proceedings this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:30)

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.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other issue that I mentioned yesterday, Mr. Speaker, was the complete callous disregard that this government has for local, small communities. The fact that in a situation in the Hudson Bay area, Mr. Speaker, they actually abrogated and breached an agreement that they had with the communities — a signed, partnership agreement that they had with those communities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about almost the virtual contempt that this government treats businesses in our communities with. In the constituency of Carrot River Valley, Mr. Speaker, there are two alfalfa dehydrating plants that have long track records of serving their communities, of being very, very successful at what they do. One is the Arborfield Dehy Ltd., the other is the Hudson Bay Dehydrators Mutual Ltd.

Both — both — of these businesses, Mr. Speaker, are on the verge of having to close their doors. And why? Because of the natural gas increases over the course of the last few months here. Just to give you an example of the kind of situation that they're facing, Mr. Speaker, in Arborfield the Dehy plant employees 106 employees during its peak processing time. This Dehy plant, Mr. Speaker, has been in operation for over 30 years and they have been very, very successful over the course of those 30 years.

But now just over the course of the last few months they are looking at closure, Mr. Speaker. And the reason they're looking at closure is because their natural gas prices have increased astronomically. Just to illustrate: in 1998 the cost was \$348,000; in the fiscal year 2000, it was \$804,000. And they are projecting that for the year ended March 31, 2001, Mr. Speaker, their

natural gas prices at that one plant alone are going to be \$1.7 million.

In the case of Hudson Bay, Mr. Speaker, a plant once again with a long history of being very, very successful in their community, a plant that has provided a large degree of employment for the Hudson Bay area. And this plant, Mr. Speaker, I might add, these . . . the board of directors of this particular operation have made every effort over the last number of years to make their operation more efficient. They have cut, and I quote:

We have cut our operational costs to a point where we cannot cut any further.

They are now facing prices and increases that, Mr. Speaker, could very well drive them out of business. Once again their operating costs for natural gas in the year 2000 were 450,000. Their estimated costs for the year 2001 are 720,000.

When they brought this to the attention of the Minister of Economic Development, Mr. Speaker, what did they get back? A letter that basically suggested to them that they should just tough it out, and I quote — the one thing in the letter that the minister said was:

I am not in a position to suggest any quick solutions.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's very, very cold comfort for two businesses that are looking at the prospect of having to close their doors, lay all their employees off, because of these astronomical increases in natural gas. People are frustrated with that kind of approach to business, Mr. Speaker.

Another issue that people are extremely frustrated with in this province is the regulatory overkill that they face every day. We have a regulatory regime in this province, Mr. Speaker, that stifles existing business and suffocates any attempt by new businesses to get started or to expand. We have duplicating, overlapping, contradicting, and repressive regulation in this province.

I have a whole number of examples, Mr. Speaker, that I could relate to you. But the one I think that I know of the best is the one that I was involved with when I was general manager of the Porcupine opportunities program. And I have talked before in this House, Mr. Speaker, about my experience in working with people with disabilities in a career spanning almost 20 years.

And one of the things that we were firmly committed to was being able to provide people with disabilities real work for real wages. In order to do that, Mr. Speaker, we very aggressively went out and we actually started businesses.

We started a laundromat. We were part of the original SARCAN recycling program. There were a number of different things that we put in place in order that we could allow people with disabilities the dignity of work.

One of the things that we partnered with the Hudson Bay rural development corporation to do, was to develop a wild fruit processing business in the northeast. We went out; we looked at the feasibility of such an operation. We found out that yes, it

was feasible. Yes, that those kinds of value-added processing opportunities could be undertaken in the northeast. And we started to work towards trying to make this a reality.

It turned out, Mr. Speaker, that everything went along just fine up until we got to the point where we wanted to scale up off of the stove-top to the processing level. As soon as we went to do that, Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden we were faced with trying to find our way through a regulatory minefield.

We ended up having to deal with federal and provincial departments of Agriculture, federal and provincial departments of Health, Bureau of Weights and Measures, bilingualism Canada. And the list goes on and on and on, Mr. Speaker.

Now this could very well have been an absolutely excellent opportunity, not only for people with disabilities, not only that they could be employed in a processing industry in northeast Saskatchewan, but, Mr. Speaker, it could very well have been a manufacturing opportunity for that entire corner of the province.

But the regulatory compliance and the cost of being able to try and find the way through and to be able to deal with all of the requirements and the restrictions was prohibitive. It probably would be no surprise to say that at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we shelved the project.

So not only did northeast Saskatchewan lose an excellent processing opportunity but we also lost the opportunity to be able to employ people with disabilities in what would have been some very, very quality, worthwhile jobs.

So the thing that I think we have to look at, Mr. Speaker — and we just entered, we gave first reading to a Bill yesterday — is we have to look at a complete, total regulatory review in this province in order to make the business environment a little more friendly to people who want to start businesses, to people who want to expand businesses. And in order that people are not constantly frustrated because they cannot, they cannot find their way through the regulatory minefield.

Actually it reminds me of a story, Mr. Speaker, I was told once by a fire inspector, a provincial fire inspector. He told me a story of how he went one morning into a particular place of business. And the owner whom he had met before and he had a relationship with, looked at him and the owner was vacuuming the floor of his business. He looked at the fire inspector as he was coming through the door and the fire inspector said he had such a look of anger on his face, it looked like he was just about ready to throw the vacuum cleaner at him. The fire inspector recognized that maybe it wasn't a good time to go in and to speak with him, so he left.

A couple of hours later, later in the afternoon, he returned to the place of business and the business owner immediately approached him, apologized for his demeanour earlier in the morning and said, you know, he said, I was just so frustrated. He said I had just opened my business that morning and he said you were already the fourth inspector that came through my door.

And not only is this person trying to run a business and has very

little time, but he is having to deal with these inspectors who are coming through the door, who are in fact taking up his time, but also each and every one of them has the ability, the arbitrary ability, to be able to close his business down. And that just was a little bit too much for him. He just could not cope with the fact that he felt that much pressure and that his business was subject to that kind of regulatory control.

We have to, Mr. Speaker, we have to review the regulatory problems in this province and I think that is another reason why people are extremely frustrated with this government, is they don't seem to be seeing anything happening in that area.

The other thing that people become extremely frustrated about, Mr. Speaker, is a government that takes credit where credit isn't due. I was appalled, Mr. Speaker, to see that in the Throne Speech this government took credit for a \$73 million early childhood intervention program that had been announced months previous by the federal minister. These are the kinds of things that people are frustrated with.

And not only do we have the government taking credit for a federal program that was announced long prior to the Throne Speech, but oftentimes we'll see them stand in their places and we'll see them take credit for things that people are doing in their own communities — for the progressive kinds of things, for the things that people are doing with very little government assistance, and in a lot of cases, with no government assistance. And they will stand in their place and they will take credit. That is extremely frustrating for people, Mr. Speaker.

Another example of very extreme sense of frustration that I seen not too long ago, Mr. Speaker, was in meeting with a group of northern mayors, myself, the Leader of the Opposition, and a couple of other MLAs met with a half a dozen northern mayors a while ago, and there are, as has been indicated, Mr. Speaker, a lot of issues facing northern Saskatchewan.

But in talking to those northern mayors, I was astounded at the bitterness that they feel towards this government and toward one — one — department in particular, the Department of Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management. The entire department permeates their everyday life to the degree that when they went to describe it and how they feel about that department, and about how they feel it controls their lives — and these are their words, Mr. Speaker — they described SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) as a colonial power.

That is absolutely incredible that one government department would be able to exert that much control and frustrate people to that degree that they would describe it as a colonial power.

Another area, Mr. Speaker, where I think a lot of people feel an extreme sense of frustration and as has been very eloquently addressed by a number of my colleagues, is the whole area of agriculture. We haven't seen even an attempt at putting a long-term safety net into place since GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) was cancelled. There was a lot of lip service paid in previous Throne Speeches to the possibility of something being looked at except until this year, Mr. Speaker. This year agriculture in the Throne Speech didn't even merit a mention of a long-term safety net. That frustrates people.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, is the attitude of individual government members. There are numerous examples, and the best one I can think of right now is the response to the Throne Speech of the Minister of Northern Affairs. The Minister of Northern Affairs made some very inflammatory comments about us as a party and about some of us as individuals, Mr. Speaker. Well the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs doesn't know any of us, Mr. Speaker. He has no right to make any kind of personal comments . . .

An Hon. Member: — Minister of Northern Affairs.

(14:45)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — . . . of Northern Affairs — of any of us.

His tactic just seems to simply be that whoever can make the ugliest accusation first, wins. And I think the Minister of Northern Affairs should be warned, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan do not — do not — accept that kind of behaviour and it will backfire on him.

In summation, Mr. Speaker, what did we hear from the Throne Speech? Really not a lot. What it amounts to is more government, bigger government, and certainly more intrusive government. Government that is solely committed to the concept of keeping dependent in order that they can maintain control, Mr. Speaker.

As I indicated earlier, I spent almost 20 years working with people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker. And it's through that experience that I learned there really is only one way that people can experience respect and dignity, and that is through independence.

And that is what we believe in, Mr. Speaker, in people being given the ability and the right to be able to go out and self-determine and for themselves decide how they are going to spend their money, make the decisions that will make their businesses successful, make the decisions that will make their communities successful. People are frustrated at not being allowed to do that. They're frustrated at government being allowed in the everyday aspect of their lives.

But, Mr. Speaker, we will give credit where credit is due and we will respect what communities can accomplish; we will respect the ability of communities to be able to do good things. And I do want to mention a couple of those, Mr. Speaker.

In Nipawin, we've seen over the last week or so a couple of highlights in the community. The first one is the very recent awarding to the town of Nipawin, of the Displayco Canada Ltd. Award for promotion and marketing, for a campaign that they undertook in the year 2000.

This award, Mr. Speaker, is given for communities that foster a better environment for tourism and that work together with partners in order to coordinate their efforts. And the economic development officer from Nipawin, Sherry Michalyca, accepted this award on the behalf of the town of Nipawin last week at a conference. And I want to extend my congratulations to them for having done such a wonderful job in the area of tourism, and a job to the degree where it's been recognized with an award of

that calibre.

Newfield Seeds in Nipawin as well just very recently, Mr. Speaker, was acknowledged by the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists, and they were presented the AGEX (Agricultural Excellence) award. And the AGEX award is designed to recognize organizations, agencies, or agricultural businesses that are committed to providing excellence in agriculture.

Newfield Seeds is an organization and a business, Mr. Speaker, that was originally founded by a Nipawin seed grower back in the '30s. They have since grown and become very, very successful and they have developed quite a reputation, Mr. Speaker, for forage and turf seed species. These are two examples of businesses in communities that are doing very, very well and there are many, many other examples of that.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I would have to say, given that this government has shown no vision, no sense of direction, and the best that it can do is plagiarize the hard work and the effort of its citizens and communities, I cannot support the Speech from the Throne, and would hope that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . They wouldn't be able to either, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to enter into this Throne Speech debate on behalf of the residents of Saskatoon Greystone. It's a great privilege for me to represent the good people of Saskatoon Greystone constituency, Mr. Speaker. And I'd like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on your election. I know you will serve this Chamber with dignity, with integrity, and with wisdom. I also want to extend my sincere congratulations to the member for Regina Sherwood on his election as our Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we've just gone through two exciting by-elections in this province, and the results have given our government renewed strength. The voters of Regina Elphinstone and Saskatoon Riversdale have given us a strong mandate to move forward on a progressive agenda. I'm proud to have the member for Regina Elphinstone join our government caucus and I'm especially proud to have our Premier lead us as the new member for Saskatoon Riversdale.

Our government's on the move and we are working to build a better future for our children and for all Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I want to touch on six important areas of government policy: taxation, labour, education, post-secondary education, the battle against poverty in this province, and the environment.

And first, Mr. Speaker, I want to say a word about taxation, because this year marks the beginning of an important change in Saskatchewan's income tax system. And there are two changes that I'm particularly pleased about. The first change is the increase in our tax credits, Mr. Speaker. The basic provincial tax credit for a single person rises to \$8,000, which means no provincial income tax will be paid on the first \$8,000 of earnings.

Mr. Speaker, families will also receive an extra break in terms of a tax credit. The provincial child tax credit will be set at \$1,500 per child, effective this year. In addition, the seniors will benefit by way of an extra tax credit of \$500 over and above the \$8,000 tax credit that I made reference to earlier.

So these are positive changes, Mr. Speaker, designed to help build a fairer tax system in our province.

The second change is the one I'm the most excited about Mr. Speaker, and that is that the Saskatchewan flat tax introduced by the Progressive Conservative government in the 1980s is gone, Mr. Speaker. And this was an extremely unfair tax, and our government recognized that, Mr. Speaker.

The fiscal dilemma that the previous government left us in made it difficult to eliminate this at first. But as we get our fiscal house in order, last year we cut the flat tax by half, and this year, Mr. Speaker, it's gone completely.

These two positive changes explain why over 50,000 taxpayers will no longer have to pay provincial income tax in our province. That's an important achievement, and one that I want to commend the Minister of Finance on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the important matter of labour standards, and the exciting announcement in the Throne Speech that The Labour Standards Act will be amended to extend maternity leave and paternity leave to 50 weeks, up from the current level of 30 weeks. This initiative is in conjunction with positive federal government changes to employment insurance, which extend maternity and paternity leave benefits.

The changes to the provincial Labour Standards Act will ensure that employers hold jobs for parents during their one year of leave from the workplace. We believe these important changes will support families and enhance the first year of children's lives by allowing mom or dad to spend more time at home with their newborn infant.

Mr. Speaker, in my efforts to represent my constituents, I'm advocating two other important changes to The Labour Standards Act. First, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see an amendment to The Labour Standards Act that will provide every Saskatchewan resident with a statutory holiday in the third week of February. At the present time, there is no statutory holiday between January 1 — New Year's Day — and Easter and I believe the time has come to put such a holiday in place.

Secondly, I believe the time has come to apply The Labour Standards Act to industrial agriculture operations, such as hog barns. Workers in large hog barns should not be exempted from The Labour Standards Act as they are at present.

Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss public education, which is of keen interest to many residents of my constituency.

Last year, you will recall that our government increased funding for K to 12 education by 4.7 per cent, four and three-quarters per cent, Mr. Speaker. And we also took some important steps to improve teacher salaries in our province. Important school construction initiatives were cost shared with local school divisions including, in my own constituency, the completion of

renovations for the Brunskill Elementary School. And also, in Saskatoon, a commitment to two new elementary schools in the Silverspring neighbourhood.

We've much more to do, Mr. Speaker, and the Throne Speech makes references to some of our priorities. One priority that will be important to Saskatoon and other urban centres is increasing the number of community schools and extending the community school initiative to the high school level. This is a progressive move, Mr. Speaker.

Put our actions in context with the proposals of the official opposition in the September 1999 provincial election. What did the opposition promise for education spending during that election campaign, Mr. Speaker?

Well first of all, they said that education spending would be frozen, Mr. Speaker. And then, already under some criticism for that comment, some of them suggested that the freeze really meant keeping up with the provincial rate of inflation. And frankly, at the end of the election, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that anybody in the province knew which they meant. Were they talking about zero per cent or an increase of 1 to 2 per cent? But whichever they meant, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our provincial government on this side of the House has made an investment in public education that far exceeds any of the commitments made by members of the official opposition.

Our 4.7 per cent increase for public education is more than double even the best estimates that could be made of what the provincial . . . of what the official opposition suggested during the last campaign.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's why — it's our commitment to public services and an investment in public services — it's one of the key reasons why members on this side of the House were elected by the people of Saskatchewan. And the members on the other side of the House that can only talk about tax increases . . . or tax cuts, but never talk about an investment in public services, that's why they're the official opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Now, Mr. Speaker, in the area of education, one of the most important issues that we need to address in our cities is the issue of children not in school. And I was pleased to see that the Role of the School Task Force began to examine this issue and offer recommendations on it, Mr. Speaker.

In Saskatoon I think we have an important social problem emerging, that all members of this Assembly need to turn their minds to, and that is the difficult problem of an increasing number of young people under 16 years of age not attending school. Mr. Speaker, community groups in my home city estimate that as many as a thousand children under age 16 are not attending school on a regular basis. And this has to be of great concern to all of us in this Assembly.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is not simply an education problem. It is a problem for our whole community and our whole province, Mr. Speaker, that every level of government and every community organization needs to turn its

mind to. And of course, one of the main reasons why children are not in school is because of the difficult family circumstances that many of them face.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to mention two things that we can do that will begin to address this issue. First we need to establish a province-wide tracking system, using Saskatchewan health card numbers to identify when children of school age are not in school.

Without such a tracking system, children fall between the cracks. They are presumed by their last school to have moved to another neighbourhood or another community. They are presumed to be in school when in fact they are not.

(15:00)

Second, Mr. Speaker, we need to mount more alternative education programs that are attached to our school divisions and that provide a small classroom setting designed to meet the needs of children who have left the school system. These classrooms may not always be in a school building. They may be in a different setting where students who have left school are comfortable coming.

But, Mr. Speaker, we need to make this social investment, because the consequences of not investing in these children are to see many of these children move into a situation where they can't obtain employment. They're more likely to end up on social assistance. They are more likely to end up as victims in our justice system, Mr. Speaker. And we are going to end up, if we don't invest in these children by way of public education, we'll end up needing to fork out dollars in social welfare and in the prison system instead, Mr. Speaker.

And I say that what we need to do in this House is make a commitment that we'll invest in every one of these children and that not a single one of them will fall through the cracks as has been the case up to now, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak . . . I want to talk for a moment about an institution that's very important to my constituents, and that's the University of Saskatchewan. The university is one of our provincial jewels, Mr. Speaker. Like other institutions in our community, it faced the reality of restraint in the first half of the 1990s as our government struggled to deal with a \$15 billion debt left behind by the PC (Progressive Conservative) government.

I'm pleased, Mr. Speaker, that in the last three years our government has found the resources to invest significantly in our university. Operating grants to the U of S (University of Saskatchewan) have increased substantially — 5 per cent increase in fiscal year 1998-99; 5.18 per cent increase in fiscal year 1999-2000; and 4.33 per cent increase in the fiscal year that's just ending.

Our goal is to help strengthen the University of Saskatchewan and post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

There have also been very significant capital investments on our campus, including renovations to the Thorvaldson Building, important renovations at the College of Agriculture,

construction of the new Kinesiology Building, and of course the investment in the synchrotron.

Construction activity on the U of S campus has been at an all-time high. There is more to do, Mr. Speaker. And I'll be working with my government colleagues to ensure we maintain a strong financial commitment to post-secondary education in our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a great many students in my riding. And of course, one of the things that's important to them is summer employment. And I'm therefore very pleased that our Premier announced last month, what is in effect a tripling of our financial commitment to student summer employment in this province.

Fifteen hundred new student jobs will be created this summer under a provincial government initiative called the centennial summer student employment program. These jobs are in addition to the existing 700 student jobs in executive government and Crown corporations, for a total of 22,000 summer jobs for Saskatchewan students.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — The program will be open to all students 16 years of age and older who will be attending school in the fall. Wages will be subsidized by the province at 75 per cent and up to \$4,000 per job. Good news for young people in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to the pressing concern of poverty in our communities and speak about the progress being made and the challenges that lie ahead. Yesterday the member for North Battleford stated in this Assembly that Saskatchewan has the second highest child poverty rate in Canada. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, that that member is in error.

I have here data published last year by the Canadian Council on Social Development showing, most importantly, that Saskatchewan's rate of child poverty is declining. And secondly, that Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland have a higher rate of child poverty than Saskatchewan. Our rate is essentially the same as that of British Columbia, approximately 19 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

The progress Saskatchewan has made in reducing its rate of poverty among children has not come about by accident but rather by careful government planning. Social assistance caseloads have declined for six consecutive years as a result of our policies, Mr. Speaker. And we've seen a drop of over 19,000 people in Saskatchewan who were relying on assistance. So 19,000 fewer people were relying on social assistance than in 1994.

Rather than adopting a work fair model which is I'm certain what the members opposite would have done as the PC government of Grant Devine did, we've chosen instead to create real jobs and real training opportunities for Saskatchewan residents.

Last year 15,000 training and employment service opportunities for current or former social assistance recipients were put in place. Our government has expanded pay equity. And we're one of only three provincial governments in all of Canada to actively invest in social housing.

And three years ago, Mr. Speaker, we launched the building independence program to give support to low-income working families. And as a result, family health benefits are now available to 23,000 families with children, and the Saskatchewan employment supplement supplements the monthly income earned by approximately 5,900 low-income working families supporting children. Mr. Speaker, this is real progress but much remains to be done.

We need to eliminate the needs for food banks in this province, Mr. Speaker, and be the first province in Canada to do so. And we need to bring the rate of child poverty to zero in this province and be the first province in Canada to do so.

Well how can we do this, Mr. Speaker? I propose four next steps in the journey towards that goal. First, Mr. Speaker, I suggest the implementation of a disability pension in Saskatchewan where the monthly benefit above the Statistics Canada poverty line for those persons in Saskatchewan with a significant physical, intellectual, or emotional disability. Thirty per cent of those on social assistance have a significant disability, Mr. Speaker, and I say it's time to take those folks up to the poverty line and above it, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I propose that we need to move towards a higher minimum wage in this province. It's time, in my personal judgment, for a significant increase in our minimum wage.

Those who work 40 hours per week ought to be able to earn enough to at least reach a standard of living equivalent to the Statistics Canada poverty line, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, that would mean taking the minimum wage in this province to 7.20.

Now we can't do that, Mr. Speaker, this year or next. But I suggest that over a four-year period we consistently move the minimum wage up in a staged manner until it does reach the Statistics Canada poverty line.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Mr. Speaker, there's a third initiative that I believe we need to make and that is we need, in my judgment, to target neighbourhoods where unemployment is very high, particularly in our large urban centres, and focus on creating employment opportunities right in those neighbourhoods.

And we're seeing some success in my home city of Saskatoon where a community development corporation by the name of Quint formed several years ago and has worked with our provincial government developing just such opportunities. But we need to duplicate that effort in every neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker, where poverty is high and unemployment is high, and create employment opportunities in that neighbourhood — opportunities like retrofitting of homes, new home construction, recycling, energy conservation initiatives, Mr. Speaker. Those

kind of opportunities.

And, Mr. Speaker, finally, I think we must recognize that while our primary emphasis should be on new job creation that some people, Mr. Speaker, will always be in circumstances where their needs cannot be addressed except through the income security systems that we have in place. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, and this is my personal view on behalf of my constituents, I think it's time in this House that we increase the Saskatchewan Child Benefit; that persons on social assistance had their eligibility for at least partial access to bus passes reinstated. In other words, let's give those on social assistance the ability to access transportation resources, Mr. Speaker, on a daily basis so they can move around the city.

I believe it is time, Mr. Speaker, that the current monthly allowance for food, clothing, and personal items was increased. I think it should go from 195 up to at least 225, Mr. Speaker. So a reinstatement of the transportation allowance for those on social assistance, and an increase in the food, clothing, and personal allowance are, in my judgment, called for.

Mr. Speaker, those are four suggestions that I have in terms of how we might address issues of poverty.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, on an ethical issue that is also in my judgment an issue around poverty, that I have never been a supporter of video lottery terminals. And it is my personal view that it is time for our province to phase out video lottery terminals over a five- or six-year period. And again, Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking in terms of my personal opinion and not necessarily government policy. It not clearly government policy, but I believe it's what should be done.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to another issue that is of deep interest to me and that is with respect to environmental policy and I want to in my closing remarks address a number of issues related to the environment.

And I want to say to begin with, Mr. Speaker, that I had the pleasure in campaigning during the last election on three personal platforms that I made a commitment to my constituents on, Mr. Speaker. And I just want to share that commitment with other members of the Assembly.

I said to my constituents that I'd do my best to advance wind power and energy conservation within our government, and have our government invest in those things. But if you look at my election literature all members can see that commitment. I promised, Mr. Speaker, that I would work for a more environmentally sustainable forestry policy as a part of our government, as well as of course our government's commitment to expanding forestry jobs in this province.

And I also said, Mr. Speaker, that I would work for an environmental clean-up program as part of the Department of Environment. And I'm happy to say today, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to inform my constituents that progress has been made on each of those fronts by our provincial government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — And I want to thank the Minister of SERM, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, and the Minister of Finance, and all my caucus colleagues for their support in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, I might first point out that you'll note in the Throne Speech our government's commitment on page 5 of that speech to wind power and energy conservation where the speech says:

My government will invest in wind power as a safe renewable energy resource and we will develop programs aimed at energy conservation.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say to my constituents, and they'll see it in the budget tomorrow, we're making progress on this front.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — And Mr. Deputy Speaker, none too soon, because we face two major challenges. One is an increase in natural gas prices that is beyond the control of our government, Mr. Speaker, because we are simply purchasing natural gas and providing it to consumers of SaskEnergy at exactly the price we purchase it, which is a point, I might say, that is never acknowledged by members of the opposition.

But we need to address rising energy costs and help cushion Saskatchewan consumers from those, and the best way to do that is through an energy conservation program, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And secondly, we need to address the urgent issue of climate change. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is warning all countries that unless action is taken many parts of the world will face very severe consequences. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to say a word about what these consequences are because in the medium term these will be of grave concern to all residents of Canada.

(15:15)

These consequences include more cyclones and tornadoes, more droughts and flooding, reduced crop yields in many parts of the world, rising sea levels and displacement of populations in coastal areas. The United Nations is estimating that unless CO₂ emissions are sharply reduced, 50 per cent — note this, Mr. Deputy Speaker — 50 per cent of the world's alpine glaciers will disappear in the next hundred years. Scientists also worry there will be greater risk from diseases like malaria as disease-carrying mosquitoes widen their reach.

So clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've got to pursue safe renewable energy development and energy conservation, not just to shield Saskatchewan consumers from higher energy prices — and that's got to be a top priority — but also to play our role in combating climate change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And unlike the government in the United States, which is signalling that they're not going to play a role in the process, we on this side of the House are, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, secondly I made reference to the fact that I promised my constituents in the last election that I would work with my government colleagues to try to implement an environmental clean-up initiative. And I'm pleased to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that is now being done.

Our government in this past year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has invested \$1.7 million in an important environmental clean-up initiative. Some of that money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is being used to clean up six large contaminated sites in the province, including the former Interprovincial Co-operatives Limited herbicide plant in Saskatoon. And another portion of the funds are being used to clean up gas stations that have been abandoned; they're in effect called orphan sites and for which no one is taking responsibility.

And third, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I promised my constituents that I would work for a more sustainable forest policy. And I'm glad to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the first changes in this regard can be seen in the very good compromise that's being developed in the Weyerhaeuser forest management area, where we're seeing both an increase in employment opportunities for people working with Weyerhaeuser, but we're also seeing some other important initiatives, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We're seeing a significant commitment to a protected area program within that forest management area, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Four areas that are being targeted for set aside. One is the Wapawekka Hills; one is a large area called Seager Wheeler which are now part of the representative areas network.

And then two other areas, Mr. Speaker, on which a no-logging order has been issued. One is the magnificence area north of Dore Lake with its gorgeous beaches, amazing biodiversity, a very important wildlife resource there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many unique plants. This area has a no-logging order issued for it and it's targeted to be in our representative areas network, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And another area, northwest of Dore, in fact north of Smoothstone Lake, the Budd Lake area that is also targeted for no logging, and I hope will be included in the representative areas network.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that there is a 1 kilometre special management zone being set up around Dore Lake and Smoothstone Lake where the community and Weyerhaeuser will work together in developing a cutting plan that is agreeable to all users of the forest, and that will be designed to protect important esthetic areas and areas that are biologically sensitive but at the same time will allow cutting to take place.

In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I invite anybody to look at that new 20-year management plan with both the job opportunities that are available and also the environmental safeguards that are there.

The third one I want to mention is with respect to road development, because we're asking Weyerhaeuser to narrow their right-of-way on their roads, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to phase out their use of landings for log loading so that we don't fragment the forest floor and so that we allow our trees, once they've been cut, to regenerate without finding that landing

areas and unnecessarily wide road right-of-ways have compacted the forest and not allowing the regeneration that is required.

So I think we see some very important compromises there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that protect jobs and the environment. And I hear the member for Cannington expressing concern about our replanning program, and I'm pleased to tell him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the commitment in this agreement is for full reforestation, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Prebble: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to address two other environmental issues that are of concern to me, and I want to make it clear at the outset, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I'm now speaking on behalf of my constituents expressing my own opinion and not that of the government.

But I think there are two other important environmental issues that we need to address in this province. And one of them is with respect to our use of pesticides, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think it's time for us to begin to develop a plan for reducing pesticide use in this province, and doing so from the point of view of protecting our farmers, protecting homeowners in our urban centres and protecting the health of Saskatchewan residents, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Members of the Assembly and the public need to realize that we are using many pesticides that have not been adequately tested by the Government of Canada or, for that matter, by any other government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I believe that our communities face a cancer risk and a risk with respect to reproductive orders from some of the unsafe chemicals that are currently in use today.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I propose that our government establish an office of organic agriculture and organic gardening that is designed to provide farmers with information about how they can make the transition to organic production and is available to advise urban dwellers about how they might make the transition in their own backyards to gardening methods that don't involve the use of pesticides, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I also believe that we should prohibit the use of pesticides around provincial government buildings, municipal buildings, schools, daycare centres, hospitals, parks, playgrounds, and all other public spaces frequented by children, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that I believe we need a comprehensive strategy to reduce the pollutants in Saskatchewan surface water, including negotiation with Alberta to reduce industrial pollution of its rivers; implementing stricter rules prohibiting aerial spraying close to important water bodies; and cleanup of pollution caused by all drilling activities; cleanup of dumpsites on or near aquifers; and fencing off where practical, surface water areas that are a source of critical drinking water and that are being polluted with livestock waste. I think we need to look at all these measures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to make two other comments with respect to the

environment before I close. And one is with respect to uranium mining, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I just want to assure my constituents that I continue to hold and advocate the view that it would be best for our province and for our world if we gradually phased out uranium mining in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know my views are a minority in the House on this matter, but I ask members opposite to respect them, as colleagues on this side do, I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I want to say that I hold this view for four important reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all because the problem of disposing of the high-level radioactive waste that all our uranium becomes has not been solved. And until it is, I believe we should not generate more of this waste, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We see in France and Germany right now, the massive opposition to a shipment of high-level radioactive waste from France into Germany. In fact, the German government has had to bring out a police force that exceeds any police presence in Germany and any military presence since the Second World War to deal with opposition to these waste shipments. And that should be an indication to all members of this House that the problem of radioactive waste disposal has not been solved, and that there is deep concern in many countries in the world about the inability to dispose of high-level radioactive wastes and a great desire by many peoples in this world not to generate any more of it.

Second, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hold my view that uranium mining should be phased out because I believe it is a well-established fact that many countries that we have sold uranium to have used that material for the creation and construction of nuclear weapons, Mr. Speaker, and for the testing of nuclear weapons.

And as long as that continues, I believe our government should not be part of it. And I believe that the safeguards that governments nationally, that the federal government claims are in place to prevent this from happening are, in effect, hollow paper safeguards that are not lived out in reality. And that the inspection procedure to ensure those safeguards are actually carried out is woefully inadequate.

And third, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hold this view because I have watched the United States not only use our uranium for atomic weapons purposes in the '60s and . . . in the '50s and the '60s when we sold uranium to them exclusively for that purpose, but I have watched them use our uranium in the '70s, '80s and '90s to expand their nuclear weapons program and to use depleted uranium in non-nuclear weapons for non-nuclear weapons purposes, Mr. Speaker.

And you can look at the Iraq war and you can see the use of depleted uranium by the US government in that war, and you can see the danger and the health hazard that that has created not only for people in Iraq, but for soldiers in the United States and for Canadian soldiers, Mr. Speaker, who are now suffering the health hazards of the use of depleted uranium in bullets and for other military purposes.

And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say I hold this view: that uranium mining should be gradually phased out because I do not believe that in the long term Saskatchewan residents will be able to easily deal with the very expensive problem that I believe long-lived radioactive tailings that our uranium mines will pose, Mr. Deputy Speaker — a disposal problem that, I think, a hundred years from now will rival the problem around high-level nuclear waste today. Because if you look at 2 or 3,000 years into the future, you'll see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the radioactivity associated with those tailings will be greater than the radioactivity associated with the high-level nuclear waste as it decays.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say in closing, I want to comment on one other environmental issue, and that is the representative areas network. And it's an initiative that I'm very proud of our government for undertaking. And as I mentioned earlier we're seeing renewed commitments to that network this year, and it's my hope that between now and the centennial year in 2005 we might be able to target another 5 million hectares to add to that network. I'm very proud that our government is advancing this network, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think it's one of the environmental initiatives that all people in Saskatchewan are going to be proud of as we move towards our centenary.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I've made it clear in my remarks that there's a great deal to be offered in the Throne Speech. It offers a very promising future for the people of this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a wide range of initiatives — economic initiatives, initiatives in health care and education and post-secondary education, initiatives designed to combat poverty, reduce poverty, and protect our environment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very proud to be in this government and I'm very proud to have our parliament led by our new Premier, the member for Riversdale.

I will be supporting the main motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will be opposing the official opposition's amendment. Thank you, very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(15:30)

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start off by offering my congratulations to the two new members of the legislature. In addition, I would like to congratulate the Speaker on his election and also you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the election.

I would like to begin my reply to the Throne Speech by offering the most important comments on this government's policy that any MLA can offer to this Assembly. They're of course the concerns and ideas of the constituents I represent. I think we would all agree that there is no higher opinion than those from the people who elected us. They are the heart and soul of our democracy.

I must thank all the residents of Arm River constituency for their overwhelming support that I've received from them during my present term as MLA.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during this past year I've travelled to

many of the towns and villages around Arm River constituency. These have taken the form of regular scheduled meetings where local residents can meet with me to voice their concerns and questions on a general or individual basis.

Several meetings in Outlook, as well as meetings in the communities such as Riverhurst, Central Butte, Eyebrow, Marquis, Holdfast, Imperial to name a few, have resulted in the detailed consensus of just how well the people in my constituency believe the present government is doing to address their concerns. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I very much enjoyed meeting with my constituents and look forward to meeting more of them as the year progresses.

What I found throughout this past year is the statement that the present government is simply not addressing concerns of people in rural Saskatchewan or the province as a whole. So it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with this important data in mind, that I carefully look at what the present Throne Speech has to offer the residents of Arm River and the province of Saskatchewan. Not much.

For all the residents of our province, the issue of health care ranks as one of the foremost concerns we should address. My office has, and continues to receive, a high volume of calls from people who are having trouble receiving the proper, efficient and effective health care that this government should be providing them.

In each case they are facing at least one of the several problems that plague the health care industry in our province. Waiting lists for surgeries and testing, doctor and nursing staff shortages, hospital bed closures, and heavily burdened emergency rooms have meant that people are simply not getting the level of service needed to treat, in some cases, maybe a life-threatening medical condition.

As the calls for better health care continue to mount, I find it extremely frustrating to be met with a wall of bureaucracy that does little to address the immediate needs of the people I'm trying to help.

Many health care districts continue to run deficits despite the large administrative staffs in place supposedly to manage these funds efficiently. So far, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see no real direction of the government to address these ongoing health care problems. I would hope that this government has more to offer the people of Saskatchewan than has been indicated in the present Throne Speech.

Indeed, there is public concern as to whether or not the issue of hiring additional nursing staff to take the pressure off our overworked nurses is even being considered by this government at all.

Saskatchewan residents deserve to know if this critical area of our health care system will be a priority in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as most of you know, Arm River constituency represents a picture of the agriculture heartland of this province. Travelling along Highway 11 between Regina and Saskatoon, one can easily see that farming remains to be the backbone of the Saskatchewan economy and agriculture.

And that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in serious trouble.

As the member for Kindersley has stated here earlier, we must help our farmers now.

My office receives many calls about the rapidly deteriorating farm income situation. Each call is more urgent than the last one as we get closer to spring seeding. You know, I have spoken with many long-term farmers who have stately flatted [CORRECT] that this is the toughest spring they've ever faced. As a farmer myself, I can directly see how low commodity prices are adversely affecting the bottom line.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the agriculture crisis has been deepened for years and we've seen very little from this government in the way of support for farm families. Again we see very little substance in this Throne Speech. There clearly seems to be no commitment to the future of farming from the present government.

All we've seen so far from the Agriculture minister is the present, permanent cover program, which provides a total of \$750 per eligible farmer for seeding maximum of 50 acres back to hay land and pasture.

The farmers are telling me — and as a farmer and as the Ag minister's a farmer himself knows it — you need a minimum of 160 acres. It should be, it should be a quarter section. I don't know, maybe in his area there's still . . . he's still farming in 30-, 40-acre chunks, but most farmers are farming in quarter sections.

Farmers need a more concrete assistance so they can have a chance at getting the 2001 crop in the ground, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Calls for more money from Ottawa must be followed by action; future generations of farmers are at stake.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, any discussion about the future of our province must also include education. The education of our children and our young adults must remain a primary concern if there is to be a bright, new future for Saskatchewan.

Yet look what's happened so far. Tuition fees at our provincial universities have risen 6 to 14 per cent in 2000, in many cases forcing students to borrow more money to get themselves through college.

A look at our rural public schools reveals an even more alarming trend. School closures in smaller rural centres seem to be the policy that this government is intent on following.

Presently, my constituency, community of Marquis is actively fighting to keep its school from closing. The prospect of busing their small children to Moose Jaw is simply not acceptable to the families. There's families around the Brownlee area have phoned me that have 6- and 7-year-old kids that could be facing a bus ride of an hour and a half, one way. And I support them in their determination to keep their school open.

Also I call on the Premier who is from . . . originally from Moose Jaw. He knows where Marquis is. If he believes what was written in this Throne Speech about expanding and building new schools; providing additional schools in rural,

urban, and northern communities; he better worry about just keeping the ones he's got open — not worry about building new ones.

He knows how close Marquis is to Moose Jaw, he knows it can grow. And it is growing. There's a community right there that's only a few miles out, that will be a bedroom community.

The people have got an action committee going trying to keep their local school open. They've called the Rural Revitalization minister a month and a half ago. Never got a call back — not from a deputy minister, not from a secretary, receptionist, nothing. They called the Premier's office — didn't get a call back. So they called the Deputy Premier — didn't get a call back. Their calls are made over a month and a half ago.

These people . . . not just about the school, they've also got a plan to show that their town is growing, the businesses they're going to attract. So where is the Rural Revitalization minister on this, at all.

You know, the Rural Revitalization minister, you know . . . and what do we see in rural Saskatchewan? We see a desperate farm committee, school closures, hospital closures, poor roads, high taxes, young people headed west for work. You know where's the revitalization and when will it arrive? So far the only thing I've heard so far, is that the office is going to be in Regina. What are they going to do? Work on bringing the rural people to Regina? I don't know.

The Premier . . . I can remember when this present Premier was running, I think it was even before he was elected as Premier, he said he would meet and talk to the people. Well the people in Marquis have tried to approach him to talk to him or to have somebody sent out to try and keep their school open — no interest. And then they wonder why you know the people in rural Saskatchewan have disdain for the present government.

You know when they come out and they say . . . they talk about how they want to reconnect, how they want to work with rural Saskatchewan, and won't even get a phone call back from many of the ministers' offices.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have so many problems and issues to deal with here, I don't even know where to begin. In light of this, one might think that rural residents do not hold much hope though for the future. But the prairie spirit that built our province is still very much alive and well despite this present government.

You know the same determination that carried our forefathers through the Depression will carry our residents through these tough times. But to realize our bright future we must take steps now necessary to make that future happen. And this present government isn't going to take them steps.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, over this past year I've done what I think is one of the most important aspects as my duty as MLA of Arm River constituency. I have listened not only to the concerns of my residents, but also their ideas for constructing solutions to the problems we face.

These ideas are offered in the most realistic way. It is in . . .

they tell me it's using what we can afford in the most efficient way possible, something this government does not do. This is the way that rural Saskatchewan residents have had to be in order to survive the many challenging rural living conditions that present . . . has been presented to them. This no-nonsense attitude is a base on what can be good long-term solutions to problems we face here in Saskatchewan, if only this present government would apply some of them.

Residents of Arm River wanted to see health care dollars spent more effectively with an emphasis on patient services, rather than top heavy administration. They want more beds for long-term care and increased surgical time, as well as additional nursing and doctor staffing. It's how excessive administration funding could be reallocated. Of course, this would result in shorter waiting lists for surgeries and tests, and hence a more compassionate, caring health care system.

Businesses in Arm River want to see a better infrastructure in place so businesses can be conducted over a truly safe and sound highway system. They're simply saying that this, in addition to a better tax climate for small business, would ensure that new jobs will be created for young people.

There is very little evidence in the present Throne Speech that indicates that existing businesses and prospective new businesses have any new incentives in the future to do more business here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, farmers in Arm River want to see an effective and efficient long-term farm support program. Simplicity above all else is what farmers have requested. The ability to draw what is needed to cover expenses in tough years balanced by an equally efficient ability to contribute to the funds in the good years is suggested as the best way to help the agriculture industry.

This strategy would keep the producers of food in our province in good shape, with minimal support from provincial or federal coffers. The stability gained by such a program could only benefit this province's present and future generations of farmers.

We must begin the process of assisting our producers now. We must help them in the direction of this kind of program so that some stability arrives quickly, therefore protecting our present farming community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my residents have repeatedly stated that the education must be maintained and improved in our rural areas and in our college system. To watch our kids grow and develop, we must also look at how we can attract new businesses to our province, that will provide the opportunity for our future graduates.

Saskatchewan families want to stay together, Mr. Speaker. Sons and daughters need the opportunity to use Saskatchewan education to build Saskatchewan, not to pack up and head west, leaving parents to wave goodbye.

With this in mind, we must look at making a broader commitment to lowering taxes in Saskatchewan so businesses will be here for future generations to come.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another concern remains at the fore on the . . . excuse me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, another issue is the issue of RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) staffing levels where, many in my communities, small numbers of RCMP officers simply cannot provide the level of security that rural residents deserve to have.

I have a community of Hanley and Dundurn. They're very concerned that they only have three RCMP officers right now. They are overworked and exposed to unnecessary dangers, having to travel alone while doing law enforcement. There was five there. There was two, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that were just on highway patrol, and they were taken and put in the city. They still patrol the local . . . the Highway No. 11, but they have to work out of the Saskatoon detachment. Why weren't they left in the town of Hanley — there would have been two more families there. That's another thing the Rural Revitalization minister can look at if she's interested in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see so many positive strengths in the residents of Arm River. And in this province that seems a shame that this government doesn't have the courage to step forward with a bold plan to build up our province. But on careful review of the present Throne Speech, I do not see any reason to believe that this present government has a will to take the action required to ensure our future.

Now another one is the high-speed Internet, Mr. Speaker. I had a business just this morning from Outlook saying that he could hire two additional staff if he had high-speed Internet in Outlook. You see he can't understand why it's going to take six years for it to come in. I mean . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I guess that's maybe fast for the way this government works, but not in any other province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan has a great potential, and the key to having new businesses developed in Saskatchewan is a friendlier tax climate from which new businesses can thrive and grow. This can be accomplished in part by not continuing the present government policy of government-funded business ventures. This policy has only resulted in lost revenue from fiascos such as SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) and Channel Lake.

Now I hear Sask Valley Potato Corp is in the process of leasing more land. It just bought a bunch new line of potato equipment, so I guess we're going to have some fun with that this summer. And you'd think this government would have learned from all the other business ventures not to get back in the potato industry, but I guess they just don't learn from their past mistakes.

The millions of dollars that were squandered here would've gone a long way towards rebuilding our highways and other infrastructure, making it more attractive for new businesses who are ensuring the safety of our provincial motorists transportation industry.

(15:45)

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a renewed agriculture sector along with new business and industry development could bring

vast improvements to our economic development. Future generations could build on this success. People could return to Saskatchewan, the place they still call home. And new families could discover Saskatchewan as a new and exciting place to live and prosper.

All that we need are the policies to make this happen. There will always be a few who say that it is too late for this or that to be done. However I believe in the old saying, it's never too late to be what you might have been.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot support the Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Good afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And first of all, I would like to congratulate you, as Deputy Speaker, and the Speaker, to the positions that you've been elected to. And I'm sure you'll have an interesting term serving in those positions and we will try and make it as rewarding for you as we possibly can.

I would like, this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to take the House through some of the things that are unique about my particular constituency, because it's different in many ways from any other constituency in this particular province.

Generally people tend to say we have two areas. We have urban seats and we have rural seats. And I guess in a simplified way that may be true, except my particular rural seat is substantially different from any of the other ones.

I guess the first way that it's different, if you looked on the map, you'd see it's very, very small, tucked in between the North and the South Saskatchewan River, starting just a little bit north of Highway 312 and then running to a little bit south of the community of Martensville. So it's the smallest rural constituency and keeps getting smaller every time there's some redistribution. And I think that says a lot for the people of that particular constituency, the constituency of Rosthern.

I'm very proud of those people, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a very innovative group. We've had new businesses start there. We have all sorts of things happening in the area of agriculture that I'll be going into in a minute or two. So it is a highly vibrant constituency.

For those people that aren't quite sure of some of the other communities that are in there, the community furthest west is the community of Dalmeny, which is situated on the Yellowhead Highway.

The other communities, for the most part, are situated along Highway 11, Highway 12, and also Highway 312. Along Highway 11, we have Warman, Osler, Hague, and Rosthern, just following that stretch through that goes through from Prince Albert through to Saskatoon. And on Highway 12, we have Martensville, Hepburn, and then we have Waldheim on Highway 312. Those communities, as I said, are very vibrant.

The other unique thing that exists in that, we have a number of small hamlets, probably half a dozen to a dozen small hamlets,

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that have a population of oh, 50 to 200 people, and adds a lot to the character of the whole constituency.

Our school buses fortunately for the most part don't have to travel very long to fill up the bus. Most school routes will start probably about 10 to 8, to 8 o'clock, and they'll have the kids at school by about 20 to 9. And I think we're very fortunate in that area when you hear some of the other concerns as my colleague just mentioned — students that have to be on the bus for an hour to an hour and a half and even two hours.

Agriculture in the Rosthern constituency is exciting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We probably have more dairies in that particular constituency than in any other area of the province. And it's nice to be able to drive home from Saskatoon to Rosthern in the evening and see the lights of all those dairy farmers that are still on. Or if you come to Regina — I left on the other morning at about 5 o'clock in the morning — to see the lights all on in the dairy barns and the work was beginning for the day.

So we have a lot of dairy in that particular area. Also a lot of beef, especially in the north part of the constituency — a number of quite large beef operators.

We have a few large hog operators and we also have a large number of smaller hog operators. And those, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pretty well rang my phone off the hook a while back when this NDP government decided, as they usually like to do, to pick winners and losers. Where they look at the economy and they say, well we'll put some money into this and scrap all the rest of them.

And what I had was quite a number of small operators phone up and say, if we would have had a smidgeon of the help of the millions this government wants to pour into a few large operators, we could have expanded very quickly. It would have taken a few weeks probably and they would have had the production up. But instead this government said no, we're going to go ahead and support one or two large ones and forget about the little ones; let them go under.

They've been able to survive, partly due to the misfortunes that are happening in Europe — the price of hogs is very good right now; may even get a little better — and they may be able to recoup some of the loses that they experienced not very many years ago.

So hogs is a big part of that particular constituency and it's nice to see those smaller operators that might have a couple of dozen or just a few hundred hogs as opposed to some of the many thousand operators that are out there.

Also in that constituency, Mr. Speaker, and I think if you drive through there during the daytime you'll see a lot of the barns used to house various birds from egg-laying projects to meat projects, that we have a lot of bird operators in that constituency and they are doing a very fine job of keeping that constituency alive and well.

Along with that, we have the exotics, and I think every constituency rurally has those sorts of things. We have the

bison, the elk, the whitetail, and then a lot of smaller people operators that will have a few alpacas and those sorts of things, which makes it a good constituency to live in, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If we look at strictly the grain operators, I think due to the blessings of this particular land, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we probably have more variety as far as crops that are seeded in the Rosthern constituency than any other place in the province. We'll have the wheats, we'll have the oilseeds, we'll have lentils and peas, flax — almost everything that's grown elsewhere in the province will be grown in this particular constituency. There's a few exceptions where it may not be the best but it is very good.

And we've had some excellent operators, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that have brought the Rosthern constituency to the forefront of Saskatchewan as far as farming's concerned, not just Saskatchewan but the world.

If you know your history, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you'll be very aware of the work that was done by Dr. Seager Wheeler decades ago in new types of cultivation. And it's exciting to go to that particular farm which is now a historic site, and when they have the seeding demonstrations and the harvesting demonstrations that go on there, to see that on Dr. Seager Wheeler's land the topsoil is deeper than it is on the land immediately surrounding, just because of the methods that he used.

And I think it says a lot for his innovation and for his foresight into new methods of farming. Those methods are now used in different forms with newer equipment all across this particular province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I would like to deal with some of the concerns that exist in that constituency. And when I look at the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and I think we all heard it and we've read parts of it on numerous times — we find there is next to nothing in here.

And I can see the members opposite going like this — they want me to miss this part. But I'm not going to miss this part, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because in this particular document there isn't very much. It reminds me of the old bard who said it's full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

And that's very much what this Throne Speech is about. It has page after page that goes on. And when you say what actually is there, it isn't there. It's not there. There's nothing there. And when I look particularly, as I said I was going to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at my constituency and how this applies specifically, I want to bring a few of those things to your attention.

One of the things is roads. And I want to commend the people of my constituency for having kept this in the forefront of the Department of Highways and government officials over the years. They've done this in a very sophisticated and dignified manner where they've met as committees and as individuals. And I have to call them highway activists, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they've been on this for a long time.

There are people who have suffered family loss on that highway probably 15, 20 years ago. And they've kept that in the government's mind ever since, saying something has to happen with these roads. And so I'm proud of the people and I'm proud of the way that they have kept this up.

Now apparently Highway 312 is going to have some work done on it this year. We're thankful for that. But that's out of last year's budget. This government's going to want to take credit for it again, but I don't think they can. Because that was a move that was made there. We have to look at what's happening this year in the Rosthern constituency in highways.

Highway 11 particularly, needs a lot of twinning. I mentioned this the other day in question period. As you drive down that road, and having lived and driven along that road for probably the last 25, 30 years, I know where the accidents took place. I know where the injuries took place. I know where deaths occurred.

And as I drive down that particular highway, I will see the crosses for many of those, but not near all of them. There's many places, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when I drive by, I know that I went by there shortly after there was a fatal accident; there is no cross there.

That highway is a dangerous stretch due to the high traffic that is there. And I'm a little concerned again for this summertime, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the traffic due to the holiday season, is going to increase dramatically. And that always puts into place traffic that flows at two different rates of speed very often, and brings about accidents and some very serious situations. So I think that needs to be looked at.

I appreciate the fact that government's doing some work on Highway No. 1 because there's some dangerous areas there, and also on the Yellowhead. And I hope and I believe this one must be next on the list because of the high traffic count that is there.

A number of things about schools. Generally in rural Saskatchewan there's been school closures and longer bus trips. In the Rosthern constituency that is not the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The only thing that's been closed are the little one-room schoolhouses, and those are one of the things that probably had to be just due to the progress of time and educational needs for high school and those sorts of things.

However, schools in that particular constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, need some serious building programs, some serious building programs. They are crowded, absolutely crowded, and that's unusual for a rural constituency but that is the case. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and this is again one of those unusual things with the Rosthern constituency — of those communities I mentioned, every single one of those communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is growing. The population is increasing, and with the increase in population, we need those schools to accommodate the children from the families that live there. So we have to take some action in that area. We need money for building.

And while I'm on the school situation, I probably have to mention that some of the things that this government has done over the past has been utterly ludicrous and create some serious

problems. One of the one is where they sent around someone to check out how safe playground equipment was, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well that playground equipment was perfectly safe. I know, I spent some 20 years in the educational system, many of those in that constituency where I also went to school. That equipment was safe. But they sent around someone who thought, well, I have to make my job look important so I have to go ahead and find all the problems I probably can. So at the end of the day he basically said all of this equipment is unsafe.

One of the things, for example, we have to have a fairly deep base of a very special kind of sand and gravel. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say you have to take out all your playground equipment just to have an inch more or less of sand is ludicrous, is ludicrous because all that happens with extra sand — and we have a member of Saskatoon looking a little frustrated about this — is all the neighbourhood dogs come in there and the cats and they use it. So all that you have is a fertilizer deposit on behalf of all the pets in the community. Serves no purpose whatsoever.

However, there is no money from this government for that playground equipment. They're going to go around and say this is suddenly unsafe and you have to take it out. They should say, okay that was our decision to take away your playground equipment; we will replace it. No, they have to do it on their own.

I attended on Thursday night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an art display and sale in the community of Hepburn, which is one of those communities that had their playground equipment deemed unsafe by this government, and deemed, by the way, is a word this government likes to use. When they have no rationale for something, they just deem it. They started that word and the use of that word with the tearing up of GRIP. And they've loved that term ever since, by deeming things to be a certain way.

And that particular community of Hepburn is now raising its own funds for that playground equipment. The scary thing is they're replacing good playground equipment with probably also good playground equipment. And when is this government going to send out another happy bureaucrat to say oh, but I've suddenly decided that you can't use this material either. So it's somewhat bizarre.

(16:00)

I mentioned earlier of some of the agricultural situations that are a problem in this constituency. One is the choosing of winners and losers by this NDP government. Where they say if you're this size of operator, you're a winner; if you're this size, you're a loser. The question isn't whether it's viable, the question isn't is it good for the community, is it good for those families — that's never asked. This government on its own, in its own little ivory tower, says here's the winner and here's the loser.

We also need to discuss the situation of the seniors in my constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm very proud of the people in my constituency because they've been leaders over the years in taking care of their seniors. Whether you go to the

community of Dalmeny, all the way through the other towns to the community of Rosthern, I look at the senior centres that they have there. They are excellent. And I'm proud of the people for the personal sacrifice they have put into it to provide that well for their seniors.

The other thing that I need to say a few words about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are the RMs and the towns which have suffered the offloading, have suffered the offloading by this government, where from time to time they said okay, we're just going to stop funding this. And they've had to raise their own taxes.

The infrastructure in these communities is getting old. The communities are growing. So you can't say — as you can say in some other parts — well, this government might say if we hang on for 20 more years we will have killed off this community and then we won't need any infrastructure.

Well in my constituency, all the communities are alive and doing well and will continue to do so, and therefore we need that money for that infrastructure for the towns and the RMs.

What does this government need to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And it's not in this Throne Speech, it's not in this Throne Speech. They need to lower taxes and get out of the way, to lower taxes and get out of the way. This particular government over the past half century has killed off business, has killed off opportunity.

And right now they have that pained look on that side again. They don't want to believe this. But all they need to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is check some of the textbooks that some of them used. Now I know they're not in use any more but I'm sure they can find them in their basements. And they will find from their era, probably some of the population numbers from the '20s and the '30s, and they'll find they're very similar to what the numbers are today, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well how come? They've been in charge of this province for almost all this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why haven't they been able to accomplish something else?

I'll give you a few examples, I'll give you a few examples of why this has happened. Shortly after Tommy Douglas took over, we had the oil rigs leave this province. They left this province to find oil someplace else. Now in past years this government said, well so what, so what, the oil will stay there. Well it might stay there.

But now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we look carefully, if we look carefully at what's happening with oil royalties, wouldn't it have been good if that NDP government and the Blakeney government and all those other NDP governments and CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) governments had said, come here and look for oil in Saskatchewan. We'll be good to you if you are. Look at the oil royalties we'd pull in.

They say that we have some sort of envy of Alberta. No, we don't have envy of Alberta. We have disgust with the NDP government for what they've done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — It's this government and the NDP and the CCF that have single-handedly chased people out of this province. They've chased them out of this province because the jobs weren't here.

And when we bring up the idea that there are things different in Newfoundland, in Manitoba, and yes, in Alberta, it's not because we're envious but it's because we're hoping this government will learn from some other governments.

These NDP, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are so convinced that only good ideas can appear in their heads — that's not true.

Let me give you one example to back that up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some time ago, three, four years ago, our Education department did some checking and they found out that our math students in Saskatchewan weren't doing as well as in other provinces. And the minister at that time — who is still a minister but not of Education — looked at that particular situation and she said, well there's only two or three reasons why our math students aren't doing as well as they should. Maybe the students aren't as smart as the rest of Canada — no, they're probably smarter. Maybe the teachers aren't as good — no, they're as good and probably better. That didn't leave her much.

You can say, well I can blame the parents but the parents are as good or better as any other place in Canada.

Left one thing, it left the curriculum. Maybe we need to change the curriculum.

And you know here we have a perfect demonstration of how the NDP in Saskatchewan think. They can never look at another province and say, how did they become so successful and maybe we can just copy it. They always think they have to go ahead and huddle off in their own little ivory tower and if the socialists dream up a dream, that must be the perfect answer.

What did the Minister of Education do? Well the Minister of Education said, we're going to put up a big curriculum committee and we're going to create our own new curriculum for Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if anyone on this side would have been Minister of Education at that time, we'd have solved that problem in about two or three minutes. We'd have looked at the province that had the highest score. And keeping in mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the kids across Canada are about the same and the teachers are about the same and the parents are about the same and if the curriculum is wrong, just get on your little old phone, dial up the province that has the best results and say, can we buy your curriculum. And next day, it'll be there. Very easy to solve.

Not a socialist government in Saskatchewan. They're going to try and fix it themselves. They've tried to fix the system since the '40s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we've seen where it's got us. They have chased thousands and millions of people, literally, out of this particular province.

We were bigger than Alberta. We were bigger than Manitoba. We were doing better than any one of those were. This building,

Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a testament to that. It was built for a province that was supposed to be big and rich and wealthy with a lot of population. Never happened. Fifty years of this particular government has brought that about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We can be . . .

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

Mr. Thomson: — Leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank the member from Rosthern for allowing me the opportunity to introduce a guest in the gallery.

I see a friend of mine who has come in to obviously take a good look at what's going on. I'm sure she'll be interested in the comments here today. In the government gallery is Adelle Oglan, who is from the Battlefords, I think actually Battleford. There we go, I got it right this time. And I'd like all members to join with me in welcoming her here today.

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.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned earlier on, I'd spent a decade or two in education and one of the things, when you have an interruption, you always have to review because people will have forgotten. And I can tell this group in front of me really isn't ahead of any other students I've ever had, so we may have to do that.

But seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, the people in the Rosthern constituency love this province. They want to stay here. They want their children to stay here. But those opportunities aren't there.

The opportunities aren't there because this government stands in the way with its taxation policy, its red tape policy, and its policy that they always think they know better than anyone else. That, Mr. Speaker, is why that many people have left.

They don't have any answers. They've been in charge of this province for half a century. Surely they should have been able to do something with it over that time. As I said, the people of this particular constituency love that.

And now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hear a member from Regina over there trying to go back to the '80s. Well, I remember very well . . . I was in Elphinstone knocking on doors not long ago, and I had a gentlemen come up with that same lame-brained argument. And I asked him, why in the world over all those

years they had elected the person who was the premier, Mr. Allan Blakeney, who himself was single-handedly responsible for \$6.8 billion of 1970 dollar debt.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — I don't mind a bit of good debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they better look at both sides of the issue when they do that.

Now, having said that, what I would like to say again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of my constituency love this province. They want to stay here; they want their children to stay here; they want their grandchildren to stay here. Saskatchewan can be a much better place than it has been for the last half century, thanks to those NDP and CCF people. It must be a much better place than it has been for the last half century, and it will be a much better place than it has been in the last half century when we get rid of the NDP across the aisle over there in the next provincial election, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — As I said earlier on, looking at this document, there's nothing in that and for that reason, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting it. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin my remarks by congratulating you, sir, on your election to the Chair. I think the members of the Assembly will be extremely well served by a person of your wisdom, a person of your great experience in this Assembly, and a person who loves his House. So we welcome you, sir, and we look forward to working with you in the years to come.

I also want to congratulate the Deputy Speaker on his election. Surely his must be one of the more difficult positions. He's neither fish, neither fowl; he's neither a Speaker nor a member, and he has to bridge both. It's a very difficult job, and we wish him well in his demanding post.

Mr. Speaker, I should also like to congratulate the new member for Riversdale on his election, the new member for Elphinstone on his election, and I haven't had the opportunity and I should also like to congratulate the member for Wood River on his election, Mr. Speaker. We welcome them to the House. Notwithstanding ideological differences between us, there is a real strength, a bond between us because we do share this unique experience, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I guess it's obvious to say that I will be supporting the Throne Speech. I think that it's an excellent speech. It's an excellent blueprint for this government. Mr. Speaker, it is visionary. It proposes to connect us to the future, which is surely where we need to go as opposed to wallowing in the past.

And, Mr. Speaker, I really, really liked this Throne Speech because for once the Throne Speech sets out some clear, specific, and I think achievable targets for all of society. I think that's a positive step forward, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go into the details of the Throne Speech but I was interested to read the reaction . . . and some of it's predictable. From the opposition, it's predictable.

But I thought that surely the most interesting juxtaposition of comments about the Throne Speech had to come from the *Review* in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker.

When I look at the front page of the *Review*, the *Review* said:

Government summarize vision in Throne Speech.

And then it says:

Government pledges to pave more highways, help rural Saskatchewan, build more schools.

And the other subheading is:

MLA Bakken denounces plan.

So there you have it. The government pledges to pave more highways, help rural Saskatchewan, build more schools, but it's a plan that's being denounced. What can you do, Mr. Speaker? You just, just can't please all of the people all of the time, Mr. Speaker.

And I guess it's predictable that an opposition would react in those ways — no matter how good the plan, no matter how good the economy's doing; always something to criticize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as they look at us they will have seen changes on our side. I mean it's no small thing — and I'm not sure of the last time — that a party changed government midstream so to speak. So they will have seen considerable changes. Your elevation that poses a change because the old Speaker is now sitting with us, Mr. Speaker — the former Speaker. Sorry about that.

But from our vantage point, Mr. Speaker, you know what we see — the same old faces, the same old line up, the same old group, Mr. Speaker. No real changes at all, Mr. Speaker — the same old crew. Now that's not without lack of effort on their part to try and get new members on their side.

After all we did go through a couple of by-elections since we last sat here. A by-election — one in Regina Elphinstone, the other in Saskatoon Riversdale — and they tried to elect members from their side to this House from those two constituencies but it didn't work out for them. And I think that's a bit troubling for them, Mr. Speaker, because generally speaking by-elections present the very best opportunity that an opposition can have to elect people from constituencies that are traditionally not their constituencies in terms of representing those people.

(16:15)

And surely in terms of Elphinstone and Riversdale they had the

very best of conditions — the very best of conditions — to elect their members to their side of the House and they fell short, Mr. Speaker. They fell short.

Now why did they fall short, Mr. Speaker? I think it's because it was my discussion with people on doorsteps is that the people of Elphinstone and Riversdale, and generally speaking the people in urban areas, are very concerned about what it is that that group stands for, Mr. Speaker. They're very concerned about what the Sask Party is saying. They're very concerned about what it is that a Sask Party government would do to them in urban areas, Mr. Speaker — very concerned about that, very concerned about their policies.

Now I know, and that all of the members on this side know, that the Sask Party has been trying very hard to reassure, reassure, reassure urban people that they are after all reasonable people with reasonable approaches to today's problems, reasonable . . . Just by and large have a reasonable approach and that they're reasonable people and try to reassure people that way.

And we see it wherever we go, the committees and banquets and all those things. They all come out and try to raise the flag as it were and to show how reasonable they are. It has a way, I guess, of taking the tension away from some of the policies that they stand for. But I'm not sure that it's working, Mr. Speaker, because for every step forward they take they take two steps back.

What do I mean by that? Well they go to the banquets and they're there to show that they're regular folks and they put on the white shirts and shaving lotion to go to the banquets and show that they're just regular folks and all those kinds of things. But then they have one of their members stand up in the House . . . one of their members stand up in the House and say to the member for Regina Northeast, well the member for Regina Northeast represents a rotten borough and that the people in that constituency must be rotten because they keep electing New Democrats to the legislature, Mr. Speaker. One step forward, two steps back.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that in the history of Saskatchewan that we have ever elected someone who was someone other than a CCF-NDP member to the constituency of Moosomin, I believe. But I would never on that account — never on that account — call into question, Mr. Speaker, the people of that constituency for exercising their right to elect who they want to this Legislative Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: —I would never, never, Mr. Speaker, say that those people were rotten for electing someone whose political ideology I did not agree with. And the member for Souris-Cannington did that, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislative Assembly, and he still hasn't apologized for that.

So I say one step forward, two steps back, Mr. Speaker. They have to clean up their act if they want to attract urban votes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to . . . I'd like to, I'd like to talk for a minute, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I should . . . I'd like to talk for a minute about an issue that receives a great deal of attention in this House and has received a great deal of attention outside of the House. It receives attention on an ongoing basis from the Leader of the Opposition, their members, certainly in the by-election it was raised, and I'm talking of the issue of taxes, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the opposition, the opposition is not the only group that has had something to say about taxes. You will know, Mr. Speaker, that . . . you will know, Mr. Speaker, that the government undertakes polling on a regular basis, polling that is shared with the people of Saskatchewan because those polling results are released to them, which is in stark contrast to the situation we found ourselves in in the 1980s in Saskatchewan, but we do release this polling information, Mr. Speaker.

And in these polls, and which are also accessible to the opposition, the people of Saskatchewan, through those polls, are also asked questions about things such as taxation.

And it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that in April 2000, April 2000, some polling was done. And the question was put, the provincial government should have frozen spending on services like health care and education and should have cut taxes more than they did. And people were asked, well do you agree or disagree, or are you unsure?

So the question was, should the government have frozen spending on services like health care and education in order to cut taxes more? And the answer is, Mr. Speaker, the majority — 69 per cent of residents — disagree the provincial government should have frozen spending on services like health care and education and should have cut taxes more than they did.

Well just to make sure, just to make sure what it is that people were saying to the pollsters, the question was flipped around. Then the question was, the provincial government should have left taxes at their current levels and should have spent more on services like health care, education, and roads. And then people were asked, do you agree or do you disagree? And in this case the majority — 70 per cent — of residents agree the provincial government should have left taxes at their current levels and should have spent more on services like health care, education, and roads.

Now I might . . . People are asking these omnibus questions. Generally the second question they're asked is: what do you think is the most important issue facing the province of Saskatchewan today? We get a range of answers. In April of 2000, 16 per cent said that taxes were the most important issue facing the province of Saskatchewan today. And that's understandable because there was a great deal of discussion in the wake of the budget that year about taxes and there was an extension of the sales tax to cover more items in Saskatchewan. So it's understandable that 16 per cent would be concerned — but only 16 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Well by October that number was down to 14 per cent. Oh, in June before that, the number was down to 10 per cent.

So that given the fact that this party opposite, Mr. Speaker, has tried their very best to make taxes the number one issue — the number one issue of concern to the people of Saskatchewan — they failed and they failed miserably, Mr. Speaker, in doing that.

Mr. Speaker, you know hardly a day goes by without them trying to attempt to raise it, you know — the Leader of the Opposition: we need lower taxes, we've got to have lower taxes, the member for Swift Current, here again today on the radio, the Leader of the Opposition. The opposition is calling for major tax cuts.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that flies in the face of public opinion in Saskatchewan. And then those members ask, why is it that we can't get elected in urban Saskatchewan. You shouldn't fly in the face of public opinion the way that you do, Mr. Speaker, by suggesting that you can have tax cuts, tax cuts, tax cuts, and only tax cuts as a means of growing the economy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last year the ink was barely dry on the budget, barely dry on the budget and the government's financial plan for the year, including a plan for great tax cuts in Saskatchewan, they started saying well now we've got to cut the gasoline tax. And it just never ends.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan economy has been growing — contrary to what they say — has been growing. And it's been very healthy growth during the course of the last 10 years. When the economy grows, Mr. Speaker, it leads to increased revenues for the government. We have always taken the position that as the revenues increase because of the growth in the economy, that those additional revenues should go to lower taxes, improved services, and programs for the people of Saskatchewan, and there are services that need to be improved, contrary to what they say, and to lower debt, Mr. Speaker.

We strive to seek balance. What is their approach? Their approach is that if you just simply cut the taxes, cut, cut, cut, cut the taxes, you'll in this way so stimulate the economy, you'll have such great economic growth, that that economic growth will then lead to increased revenues.

Well where have we heard that one before, Mr. Speaker. We certainly heard it from Ronald Reagan in the United States in the 1980s, and people said then, it's a fine theory but it's a dubious, dubious thing for government to do, Mr. Speaker. Because very often what it does, it leads to deficits. It leads to deficits for government, Mr. Speaker.

To base your whole economic development strategy on this dubious theory reminds too many, Mr. Speaker, in our urban areas, of the very disastrous experience they had with the Devine government in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. It is more than disastrous. It was massively destabilizing for the economy in Saskatchewan, and put us into a situation that took us years to recover from, Mr. Speaker.

This is the so-called voodoo economics that the Minister of Finance was talking about in question period, Mr. Speaker. Is there any wonder that Saskatchewan people and urban people — where the economy is working very well these days, Mr.

Speaker — are nervous about their slavish adherence to a very dubious economic strategy, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes that are remaining to me, I just want to, in a very similar way, just briefly talk about population. I think the member prior to me who spoke — again as many of the members did — talk about the loss of population in Saskatchewan. And I think that's a serious issue and one that the government should be dealing with. And the government needs to promote economic growth, although I would point out I think the TD (Toronto Dominion) Bank today, said again, that Saskatchewan's economic growth will lead the national average next year, so that we are projected to be doing reasonably well, Mr. Speaker.

But we should be concerned and we should continue to promote economic development, Mr. Speaker. But, you know, when they talk they remind me of another member, a former member of this House, Mr. Speaker, who used to make emotional speeches about keeping Saskatchewan children at home through economic development, and who highlighted a lack of economic activity in the province with speeches about Saskatchewan grandmothers who saw their grandchildren only at Christmas because their parents had moved away from the province to find jobs.

Who said that, Mr. Speaker? That would be one Mr. Grant Devine, the former member for Estevan, Mr. Speaker, who said these things, who was so disturbed about the increase in population that was taking place under an NDP government. He said it was not enough; they could do better.

We all know what happened. Population loss, population loss in the late 1980s in Saskatchewan reached crisis epidemic proportions, Mr. Speaker, just as it did in the latter part of the 1960s under the Liberal right-wing Ross Thatcher government, Mr. Speaker.

And so when they say we want to talk about population, there are many, many urban people who all of a sudden get very, very nervous when they start talking about population, Mr. Speaker. They say we're going, we're going to have . . . we have the solution for that. But the solutions in the past have proven to be disastrous because they have shown that they're incapable, incapable of managing the economy.

They come to government with these extreme notions about how to manage the economy. They're prepared to take all kinds of great risks, Mr. Speaker, and in the past have driven our economy into the ground, Mr. Speaker. We cannot in Saskatchewan afford any of that kind of destabilizing approach to government as we've seen in the past. And that is why urban people are very, very nervous, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to population.

I mean the history of Saskatchewan is that there was tremendous population growth up until 1936 and then a sharp drop until 1951. And from '51 it increased right up until 1969 when after a number of years of Liberal Party government, we saw a decline again, Mr. Speaker, only to see an NDP government bring it back up again. And Mr. Devine continued that until the latter part of his term, then it dropped off sharply again, Mr. Speaker.

That is the pattern, that is the history in Saskatchewan. We will continue to be challenged in Saskatchewan. But people in Saskatchewan are also very aware that given the opportunity that party opposite in government will make a far mess . . . worse mess of things than they ever want to see in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Chair of Committees of this Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly adjourned at 16:36.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a few remarks. I look forward to carrying on this debate when we discuss the budget in the days ahead, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(16:30)

The Speaker: — Order. I must inform the Assembly that under rule 14(4), it is my duty at this time to interrupt debate and put all questions necessary to dispose of the main motion.

Motion agreed to.

MOTIONS

Address be Engrossed and Presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Regina Sherwood:

That this address, the said address be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are of the Executive Council.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Ways and Means

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Regina Sherwood:

That this Assembly, pursuant to rule 92, hereby appoints the Committee of Finance to consider the supply to be granted to Her Majesty, and to consider ways and means of raising the supply.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly, to move a motion appointing the Deputy Chair of Committees.

Leave granted.

Appointment of Deputy Chair of Committees

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Rural Revitalization:

That Mr. Graham Addley, member for the constituency of Saskatoon Sutherland, be appointed to preside as Deputy