

The Assembly met at 13:30.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Draude: — . . . Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present today on behalf of people who are concerned about children who are being exploited through the sex trade:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately implement all 49 recommendations of the final report as submitted by the Special Committee to Prevent the Abuse and Exploitation of Children Through the Sex Trade.

The people that have signed this petition are from Watson, Saskatchewan.

Mr. Gantfoer: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of citizens concerned about deficiency in the tobacco legislation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any such tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

Signatures on this petition today, Mr. Speaker, are all from the great community of Tisdale.

I so present.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the deplorable condition of Highway 339. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to repair Highway 339 in order to facilitate economic development initiatives.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Avonlea and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to present regarding the condition of our highways in this province. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to make the necessary repairs to Highway 35 in the Indian Head-Milestone constituency in order to prevent injury and

loss of lives and to prevent the loss of economic opportunity in the area (Mr. Speaker).

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This petition is signed by people in the Francis, Yellow Grass, and Radville area.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of people from southwest Saskatchewan concerned about the current state of tobacco control legislation in the province. And their petition notes today, Mr. Speaker:

That the government's current tobacco reduction strategy places all responsibility for the sale or possession of tobacco solely on retailers and their clerks; and there is no legislation that makes it an offence for those under 18 to be in possession of tobacco products.

And the prayer of the petition would address that situation.

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are from Swift Current, Hazlet, Hodgeville, and Neville.

I so present.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about certain inadequacies in the tobacco legislation. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend the tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petition is signed by citizens of Carrot River, Kelvington, Big River, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of constituents concerned about . . . with the changes to this year's crop insurance program. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to halt its plan to take money out of the crop insurance program and hike farmers' crop insurance premium rates while reducing coverage, in order to pay off the provincial government's debt to the federal government.

The signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the

communities of Southey and Cupar.

I so present.

Mr. Allchurch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in the Assembly today to bring forth a petition regarding the tobacco law. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately amend tobacco legislation that would make it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be in possession of any tobacco products; and furthermore, anyone found guilty of such an offence would be subject to a fine of not more than \$100.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

And, Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition are all from the centre of Spiritwood.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions are received:

Addendum to a petition concerning the legal age for possession of tobacco;

A petition concerning repairs to Highway 35; and finally

A petition concerning the resolution of the Lake of the Prairies situation.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 13 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways: in the 2002-2003 fiscal year, will the Department of Highways provide the necessary funds to develop a test section of highway construction using rubber asphalt technology; if so, what are the details of any such test planned for the coming fiscal year?

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 13 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Highways and Transportation: how many truck gravel boxes did the department purchase directly or through SPMC in the 2001-2002 budget year; further to that, Mr. Speaker, did the department accept the lowest tendered price and if not, why?

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to welcome and recognize and ask all my colleagues here in the Assembly and yourself, Mr. Speaker, to

welcome two very special people in my life . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Obviously the member from Kindersley doesn't have very many special people in his life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, in the west gallery I'd like the members to please welcome my wife, Barbara — who's on the left, by the way, because they have been mistaken for sisters — and my super daughter, Kim, on the right.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Ladies and gentlemen . . . thank you. I know that I speak on behalf of all members, Mr. Speaker, when I say that it's those kinds of special people that support us in our efforts on behalf of all the people in this great province of ours. And without their support some of us may not be here; some of us may have more difficult times than we have been having by being here. So I want them to be welcomed very much and thank them again.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two people seated in your gallery. Vern Hoyt and his son, Adam, are from the Regina Victoria constituency. Vern is the president of the Sask Party Association there and he's a very dedicated worker for us. And I'm sure his son is anxiously awaiting to join in the ranks and work for us as well. I'd ask all members to welcome them. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are again joined this afternoon, in the east gallery, by Mr. David Karwacki, Leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party. I'd ask all members to kindly welcome him this afternoon.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may, and I appreciate the opportunity once again, to introduce and ask you to welcome to the legislature here today, a long . . . well-known member, and an astute member of the political world in this great province of ours. Again, Mr. Emmet Reidy, who is also sitting in the east gallery, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask everybody to welcome him.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Gas Plant to be Built this Spring

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More good news for Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Construction of an \$88 million gas conservation plant, approximately 1.7 kilometres west of Glen Ewen, will begin immediately after the spring break up. BP Canada has obtained the necessary permits, and the time frame for opening the plant in June or July of this year.

Mr. Speaker, the plant will process solution gas from surrounding oil wells in the area and complement the already existent plant in Steelman. Normally this gas is flared as a waste product at the well site or the oil battery, Mr. Speaker.

The plant will process three million cubic feet per day of recovered solution gas. The solution gas will arrive at the plant by a pipeline from the surrounding wells and oil batteries and is sweetened by removing hydrogen and sulphide . . . hydrogen sulphide and carbon dioxide which produces propane, and butane.

Mr. Speaker, this is another achievement to demonstrate that private investment is not deterred from investing in our province, but encouraged by this province's responsible stewardship in government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Catholic Family Service Fundraiser in North Battleford

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this past Saturday evening, the Catholic Family Service of North Battleford presented Cinderella, A Fantasy Evening. It was their tenth annual charity dinner and auction, held at the Tropical Inn in the North Battleford . . . in the city of North Battleford.

The vision of the Catholic Family Service of The Battlefords Incorporated is to live in accordance with social justice, accepting our common calling to help others preserve, restore, and enhance their quality of life. The mission of the Catholic Family Service of The Battlefords is to enable families to make life-giving choices which promote esteem, trust, and courage to live despite limitations and loss, and the mercy to forgive injuries.

I had the pleasure of being seated at the table with a number of people: my wife, Cindy; my mother- and father-in-law, Ron and Rose Poelzer; also the chairperson of the Catholic Family Service, Marlene Tarnowsky and her husband, Peter; and also a very distinguished parliamentarian, Senator Herb Sparrow and his wife.

We had a very enjoyable evening, mixing politics and religion, and all in good spirit and raising money for a very good cause. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Yorkton Business Awards

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to highlight a very prestigious event that was held on Saturday in the city of Yorkton. Four hundred and fifty community leaders and business people attended the fourth Celebrate Success awards that recognize 12 local businesses for their outstanding contributions in eight separate categories, Mr. Speaker.

Twenty-nine community businesses and associations were nominated, who all make a very valuable contribution and

success to the city of Yorkton and east central Saskatchewan. And the winners included: the community involvement was the Bank of Montreal Nesbitt Burns; property restoration was The York House Dining and Lounge; the new expansion business was GX Radio and The Fox. The customer service was The Bentley Retirement Community. And young entrepreneur was Jim Dandy Clothing.

The Wall of Success included Brown's Leisure World, Ottenbreit Sanitary Services, and the York-Saskatchewan Drycleaners.

And the community merit awards, Mr. Speaker, went to the Health Foundation of East Central Saskatchewan, which by the way is raising nine and a half million dollars for a new project out there; the Yorkton Short Film & Video Festival, the longest video festival in Canada; and the Snowarama for Easter Seals, 25 years of continuous success.

And the business of the year was Bailey's Funeral Home/Yorkton Memorial Gardens Crematorium and Family Services.

Mr. Speaker, if I were to capture the theme of the evening, the award winner after winner talked about the pride of Saskatchewan and how people appreciate and how the province . . . appreciate the province and city, and how much they have to offer in accelerating the successes in our province.

Yorkton is a community of vision, Mr. Speaker, and a goal. Today we're number three in trade and business in our province; and, Mr. Speaker, they're aiming soon to be number one.

Congratulations to the event organizers, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Author Receives Order of Canada

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier this year Eastend author, Sharon Butala, was named an Officer of the Order of Canada. Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada, made the announcement on January 14.

The Governor General will present the medal to Sharon at a ceremony being held in Halifax later this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sharon Butala was the lone Saskatchewan honouree among 29 individuals selected to the officer rank of the Order of Canada, and just one of two provincial residents to receive honours in the year 2001.

The Order of Canada recognizes people who've made a difference to our country by recognizing their outstanding achievements in service in various fields of human endeavour.

(13:45)

Sharon Butala's writing has captured the essence of the Saskatchewan prairies and explores the lives and the musings of people who inhabit them. Her outstanding achievements in

writing, her involvement in the community of Eastend, and in the preservation of the natural grasslands are examples of Sharon's desire to bring the meaning of southwest Saskatchewan to the rest of Canada.

Not only is she a worthy recipient of this prestigious award, but an inspiration to all of us. I am sure all members will wish to join me in extending our congratulations to Sharon Butala.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

University of Saskatchewan Students Win International Competition

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the first weekend of this month, University of Saskatchewan students, Dan Murza and Cory Weiss, competed in the International Undergraduate Student Business Plan Competition held in Lincoln, Nebraska. The competition was fierce with teams from business schools all over the continent, but these two Saskatchewan students won first place and 7,500 US bucks.

Their winning idea was called Sandow SK Classic, a manufacturer and on-line store that features replicated and authentic collectible 1970's jerseys and accompanying display cases.

The Sandow business plan was developed as part of an entrepreneurship class and grew from there. Sandow uses eBay as its selling forum, but is developing its own website and plans to supply sporting goods stores after the brand name has been established.

Monica Kreuger, the instructor for the team's class says the success of Dan and Cory shows that we have the talent to compete with the rest of the world and win. This team has proven that solid opportunities exist for profit-based businesses owned by young people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, she went on to say that they have beaten teams from many other universities in the U.S. and Canada that have large entrepreneurial programs, substantial funding, and easier access to capital. We should be proud that our U of S (University of Saskatchewan) students have done so well against such competition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Nipawin Resident Wins Prestigious Award

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker the Saskatchewan Country Music Association has honoured Nipawin's Jim Chute with its prestigious Legend and Legacy Award. The Nipawin hotelier and songster was caught completely by surprise last weekend when he was presented with the award.

The award, which is not presented every year, acknowledges Jim's considerable contribution to the country music scene. This dates back to his early days in the industry in Calgary through the Barlee Band days to his presidency of the Saskatchewan Country Music Association and his continuing involvement in and support of country music.

To add to his surprise, his mother and three sisters were also in attendance for the presentation.

Mr. Speaker, Craig Day, originally of Nipawin, was also honoured at the event. Craig received the Saskatchewan Country Music Association's Humanitarian award for his work on the Schmirler project. Craig collaborated on a musical tribute to his cousin, Saskatchewan Olympic champion curler, Sandra Schmirler. Proceeds from the sale of the ensuing CD (compact disc) have gone to cancer research in Schmirler's name.

I would ask all members to join me in congratulating Jim Chute and Craig Day on this tremendous accomplishment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Barker Foundation

Ms. Hamilton: — Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw attention to yet another example of the spirit of Saskatchewan. Fred Barker began farming in the Daphne district with his sister Louise after Fred returned from serving in the Second World War. The Barkers always supported small town Saskatchewan and after Fred's death on April 8, 1995, Louise — now living in Sunshine Manor — wanted that support to continue. With a desire to leave a lasting legacy of support and to help decide where the support would go, Louise set up the Barker Foundation. After a year of dotting and crossing all the legal t's and i's, the first donations have now been made.

The first recipients are McNab Park, Watson Skating Arena, Humboldt hospital fund, Spalding United Church, and lastly, a \$1,000 scholarship for a graduating student from Watson High School. The scholarship — to be awarded annually — is for a grade 12 student who excels in math and science, both of which are areas of great interest to Ms. Barker.

Besides Ms. Barker, four other members sit on Barker Foundation Board. They are Gordon and Norma Weber, Brenda Curtis, and Regan Bernard.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud these efforts and recognize them as an enduring example of the community spirit and pride found in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Kenaston Dinner Theatre

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night, I had the honour of attending the annual Kenaston dinner theatre. This year's event attracted over 450 people over the course of Saturday and Sunday. The money raised by this event will go towards the operation of Kenaston Place — the local town hall in the community of Kenaston.

This year's play was entitled, *Who Done it, and to Whom?* Kind of sounds like the present government's budget title. Of course, we all know that these events are the result of huge efforts of volunteers from the community itself and surrounding area. There are about 100 volunteers, including the cast and crew, as

well as the numerous dinner servers, of which I had the pleasure to assist them last night.

I'm very pleased to see that these community projects remain successful despite the fact that so many rural residents are leaving our province in such large numbers. Folks who are leaving would admit that if they had the choice to stay and be part of the community, they would do that.

I would like to congratulate the residents of Kenaston for organizing such a fine dinner theatre this past weekend. I would like to thank all the volunteers who helped make this evening so successful and wish them success in the years to come. I would ask that all members join me in saluting the community of Kenaston for their Saskatchewan spirit. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Workers' Compensation Board Report

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Labour finally released a Workers' Compensation report, a report that had been hiding since December of last year. This report paints a clear picture of government getting bigger and bigger, yet services to employers and employees is not getting any better.

From 1995 until the year 2000, administrative costs at Workers' Compensation grew by over \$12 million or almost 50 per cent. Yet the number of claims barely increased at all. Why are Saskatchewan employers paying 50 per cent more in administrative costs when the overall size of the program is virtually unchanged from five years ago?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that this morning that we had the opportunity, along with WCB (Workers' Compensation Board) board chairperson, John Solomon, to release the COR (committee of review) report.

Mr. Speaker, this is a report that is, by legislation, required every four years for a review done of the compensation system. This is a very good report. The committee put in a great deal of work and there is some excellent recommendations that will address the Workers' Compensation system and address many of the concerns there are with the system.

This report went for a very good release this morning, Mr. Speaker, and I'm looking forward to a very good year with WCB.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister did not question whether there was good things in the report. I had a specific question for the minister and she refused to answer the question.

Mr. Speaker, this report indicates another clear example of the NDP growing the government instead of growing

Saskatchewan. Administrative costs jumped 50 per cent, from \$25 million in 1995 to thirty-seven and a half million dollars in the year 2000. The number of WCB staff jumped by 25 per cent, from 337 in 1995 to 407 in the year 2000. Yet, the number of reported claims increased by less than 3 per cent over the same period; 25 per cent more staff, 50 per cent more administrative to manage 3 per cent more claims.

My question to the minister. This is one more reason people in jobs invest . . .

The Speaker: — Would you please go directly to the question.

Mr. Hermanson: — Why is the NDP (New Democratic Party) growing the government instead of growing Saskatchewan? Would the minister answer the question?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, WCB is an independent board, but it also enjoys and provides to businesses of Saskatchewan some of the lowest rates across Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — It also provides . . . Speaker, it also provides excellent service for the 37,000 claims that are handled through the board yearly. And good service to the employers that are stakeholders in WCB.

Mr. Speaker, over the past five years, two years actually, WCB has had a number of reviews and has gone through a massive restructuring and reorganizing, giving team-based approach for services to clients, which is more appropriate, geographically based throughout the province. It will give better service to injured workers. And also the balanced score card in administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister isn't prepared to deal with her responsibility, but you would think she would at least ask the question: why have costs skyrocketed when in fact the client base is about the same?

Mr. Speaker, the WCB has hired 25 per cent more staff, they are spending 50 per cent more money, but the service to injured workers is not getting any better. Many injured workers who appeared before the Dorsey review said that the WCB service was getting worse. Workers complained that the WCB was not accountable. Doctors describe it as fortress WCB. And Mr. Dorsey himself recommended that the NDP launch a fairness audit of the WCB and appoint a full-time appeal commissioner.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Labour listen to injured workers, doctors, employers, and its own report, and launch a fairness audit of the WCB and hire a full-time appeals commissioner? Will she do that?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the

Opposition is correct that was one of the recommendations in the report. But the decision's been made that we need input from our stakeholders, feedback from our stakeholders, if this is the appropriate and the best action for the board to take, not only to provide good service for injured workers but also accountability to the stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House prefer to have feedback from stakeholders, not make decisions no matter what the consequence like the members of the opposition.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Accounting Practices for Forthcoming Budget

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's the height of sleaze. That's how one NDP insider is describing this week's budget. The NDP plans to change its accounting methods in order to hide the deficit.

Mr. Speaker, it now appears the new Premier has set out to destroy Roy Romanow's legacy of balanced budgets and fiscal integrity. The Premier has instructed his Finance minister to do some creative bookkeeping and hide the deficit in a desperate attempt to cover up his own mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP resorting to such desperate measures to cover up its own mismanagement and hide the deficit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to talk about the height of sleaze. I'll tell the member opposite and the House what the height of sleaze is — the height of sleaze, Mr. Speaker, are people that make shameful comments in the media anonymously, without identifying themselves.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, that if anyone has anything to say they should come forward into the open light of day and make their statement. And I'm prepared to have a public debate, Mr. Speaker, with anyone over the practices of this government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — And while I'm on my feet, I want to say to the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, through you, we have had for decades in this province a practice of financing municipal infrastructure through the Municipal Financing Corporation including water projects. And I want to know if that party over there is against that kind of financing for third parties, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — You know, Mr. Speaker, last year the NDP tried to use its so-called rainy day fund to hide a \$500 million deficit. And it didn't work. So now they're inventing a new trick to try and hide the deficit. No wonder some of their own members are calling it the height of sleaze.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan people deserve open and

accountable government; not Enron-style accounting tricks from the NDP.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:00)

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister's own mid-term report stated nothing about a new accounting principle. The third-quarter financial report stated nothing about a new accounting principle.

Mr. Speaker, if the NDP has nothing to hide, what is the reason for this sudden change? If this is an appropriate accounting practice, why wasn't Roy Romanow using it for the past 10 years?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — You know, I'm always amused, Mr. Speaker, how these days Roy Romanow is touted as the opposition's hero . . . (inaudible) . . . When he was here, when he was here, I don't recall him saying that, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to say to the members opposite, I haven't seen any announcement of a new system of accounting for the province of Saskatchewan, so the members opposite are going to have to enlighten us.

But I want the members opposite to come clean, Mr. Speaker. I want them to tell the people of the province and this House whether in principle they believe that third parties — not the government but third parties — should be denied access to financing and amortizing capital costs over time. I want them to go on the public record, just as all the other anonymous people should, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier should be thinking about changing the name of the NDP — he should change it to the EnronDP.

Mr. Speaker, there is one step that the NDP could be taking to provide a clear and honest picture of this province's finances. They could, they could be moving to summary financial statements in order to show a complete picture of all the province's finances. No more funnelling money in and out of Crown corporations, no more imaginary transfers from the rainy day fund that doesn't exist.

Mr. Speaker, 7 out of 10 provinces have already made this move. And the Provincial Auditor is calling on this government to also make this move instead of playing jiggery-pokery with the books in order to hide the deficit.

Will the NDP give the people of Saskatchewan a complete and honest picture by going to summary financial statements?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — In case the member opposite missed it, Mr. Speaker, this government has published summary financial

statements since approximately 1992 — one thing they never did when they were in power, Mr. Speaker. We publish summary financial statements fully audited by the Provincial Auditor every single year, Mr. Speaker. And not only that, we introduced mid-year financial statements and quarterly statements.

When it comes to accountability, Mr. Speaker, we can compare our record to their record, a record which included in one year not even producing a budget, Mr. Speaker. So when it comes to accountability, we don't have to take any lessons from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and everybody in this province knows it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I think you can forgive Saskatchewan people for being a little suspicious.

Last year the Premier took over from Roy Romanow and he inherited a huge surplus. He quickly turned that into a massive deficit. Then all of a sudden he decides he has to change the way the books are kept. He tells his Finance minister to disguise the budget and create the illusion that the General Revenue Fund is somehow balanced. Mr. Speaker, it's not only the height of sleaze; it's the height of desperation.

As an NDP source stated in Saturday's *Leader-Post*, and I quote:

What you . . . have is a deficit accounted for in a new way.

Mr. Speaker, what is he hiding? We have been told that there are summary financial statements. No summary financial statements come to this House with the current budget; and I ask the Finance minister to present those summary financial statements on Wednesday when he delivers his budget. Or is he only trying to cover up a deficit?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Well, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite doesn't know that summary financial statements can't be produced until after year end until they're audited, then there's not much I can say that will help the members opposite. But I . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — But I do want to say this, Mr. Speaker, you talk about plans. What we have from the members opposite are promises to cut taxes in addition to the tax cuts that have been brought in by this government which total, Mr. Speaker, \$981 million. They are telling people that they will cut taxes by \$981 million.

And how will they pay for it, Mr. Speaker? Oh, they'll sell off the Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker. Now in year one, that might work. Cut taxes by a billion dollars and spend the proceeds from the Crowns.

In year two here's their plan, Mr. Speaker — no tax revenue and no assets. Well how does that add up, Mr. Speaker? It

doesn't add up. They know it. We know it. And the people of the province know it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crop Insurance Program

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on Friday we revealed that Saskatchewan farmers will be facing huge increases in their crop insurance premiums for this year for a significantly reduced level of coverage, due to the removal of spot loss hail and the variable price option.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, one farm, as an example, in risk area 11 in the Raymore area has calculated the same spot loss hail coverage as last year will now cost \$5.50 per acre more this year.

Mr. Speaker, to purchase this same level of crop insurance and hail insurance as that farmer had last year, his premiums will increase by a whopping 206 per cent. Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain to the farmers of Saskatchewan who may be facing the second year of a drought, why is he increasing premiums on the provincial crop insurance program by as much as 206 per cent?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, the member's question today goes on to tell Saskatchewan farmers and Saskatchewan producers across the province that the member opposite has absolutely no idea about what's happening in the agriculture community at all. No idea, Mr. Speaker.

Because I said to the member yesterday, or last on Friday . . . I said to the member on Friday that crop insurance premiums are going to go up in this province because the federal government didn't put its share in on the formula adjustment. That's what I said to him on Friday.

He has then had a conversation, Mr. Speaker, with the president of the Crop Insurance Corporation and the president of the Crop Insurance Corporation has said in Saturday's article and I say to the member he just needs to read . . . and he says this:

Prices have increased for commodities, which will increase coverage per acre as well as (the) premiums.

Coverage is up, premiums are up. Why are they down is what he said. The biggest drop for the cost share commitment is down from 35 per cent to 28 per cent was the going reason by the federal government, is what Mr. Matthies says. And so the member should know, now . . .

The Speaker: — Time has elapsed.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, it's going to cost Saskatchewan farm families thousands of dollars more to access the same level of coverage as they had last year. On this one farm as an example, the total premium costs for crop and the spot loss hail insurance coverage will cost this farmer an additional \$8,000 more in premiums over last year.

There's been a lot of talk about safety nets in this House over the last year, and there have been many changes and reincarnation of federal programs. But the farm families of this province are especially relying on crop insurance, particularly when we have continued drought conditions. But the NDP now have ripped that protection out from under them once again.

How can the Minister of Agriculture justify reducing coverage, at the same time jacking premiums up to farmers across this province by as much as \$8,000 per farmer?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to go one more time to the member opposite, because he does not appear to have a full appreciation of what the issue is, and I've tried now on a couple of days to explain to the member. And I hear the member say now that farmers are going to get the same level of coverage is what he said just a minute ago.

Now he said for the last couple of days that they're going to get a reduced level of coverage. Today he says they are going to get the same level of coverage. Well this is what they are going to get, Mr. Speaker. If you were to take the average of wheat in the province, Mr. Speaker, and you take the coverage will go up this year from \$95 to \$103 an acre, Mr. Speaker. And the premiums are going to go up from \$2.31 to 3.01, Mr. Speaker. And if you do that on canola, Mr. Speaker, this is what will happen to canola in the province — the coverage will go up from \$93 to \$136 an acre.

Coverage is up, Mr. Speaker, on average, and the prices are up. But the member needs to get it right, Mr. Speaker. The reason why coverages are more expensive this year for producers is because the federal share of their . . . in the formula is less. And everybody knows that in the province, Mr. Speaker, except the member from Kindersley doesn't know it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in addition to the changes that we've outlined here earlier, the minister has also announced a new forage program and a crop rainfall pilot program. The program will base insurance payouts on historical rainfall levels at area weather stations. But the catch is is that producers can choose a weather station from anywhere they want in the province.

For an example, a farmer near Leader can choose a weather station in the Melfort area. If that weather station receives less than 80 per cent of the normal rainfall levels, then the farmer at Leader will receive a payout. But if the rainfall levels aren't below normal, he's out of luck. Even if his crops are completely decimated by drought, he's out of luck.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan producers are shaking their heads at this program. Why is the Minister of Agriculture making farmers gamble for their forage and crop rainfall protection?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we should remember that it's exactly that member there last year

who made fun of the forage program that we put in — the crop coverage program. Exactly the same member, Mr. Speaker. Exactly the same member who made fun last year of the community Internet across the province. The same guy, Mr. Speaker, the very same guy.

Now today the member is standing up and saying that the crop rainfall forage program . . . or crop program is a sham. And I want to say to the member opposite and to you, Mr. Speaker . . . through you, Mr. Speaker, that last year the forage rainfall program is now being adopted in this province under the main program of crop insurance. Why? Because that's what Saskatchewan farmers says works and that's why we're doing it.

And this year, Mr. Speaker, we're implementing the crop . . . this year we're implementing the crop forage rainfall program. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because that's what Saskatchewan producers say works in the province. And if we're not . . . and we're not paying attention to what the member from Kindersley says because every time he supports farmers, we're in trouble, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this crop and rainfall program is a crapshoot, plain and simple. In fact with this program it's quite possible for a farmer who has a bumper crop to cash in because if the rainfall station he chooses receives less than 80 per cent of normal rainfall levels he gets a payout regardless of whatever type of crop he has. Yet another farmer who ends up with a crop disaster will not receive a payout if the weather station he happens to bet on to . . . doesn't receive adequate rainfall.

Mr. Speaker, a farmer may want to choose his own local weather station for his rainfall coverage but because there's limits on the number of producers that any station can cover, he may be excluded from that option.

Mr. Minister, will the minister of the House explain to Saskatchewan farm families why this program makes any sense at all.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — . . . why this program makes sense because, Mr. Speaker, this is why it makes sense. Last year our Farm Support Review Committee travelled the province and talked to producers and producer organizations and farmers and said, what do we need to do, Mr. Speaker, to enhance the crop insurance and the farm support revenue programs in the province?

And what they said, Mr. Speaker, is that you need to take your forage rainfall program and you need to implement it on a full crop insurance basis, which we've done, Mr. Speaker. And it was based exactly on the same program that we're implementing this year on the crop sector — exactly the same, Mr. Speaker — of which farmers are endorsing in scores, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the member opposite, when we take a look at the document, the Farm Support Review document, which consulted with farmers and producers, this document right here,

Mr. Speaker, of which everybody consulted with. Nowhere in this document, Mr. Speaker, is any representation from the Saskatchewan Party. No representation. They're disconnected, they're out of touch, and they don't understand what's happening in the agricultural field, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(14:15)

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, this program is so flawed, so defiant of any logic, and such a gamble for producers that we've renamed it. Maybe we should call it the Serby derby, or more appropriately . . .

The Speaker: — Order. The member knows full well he's not to use, refer to members, other than by their title or by their constituency.

Mr. Boyd: — Well then maybe more appropriately it should be named rainfall roulette. Crop insurance agents will now become the croupier at the roulette tables. Perhaps crop insurance should use the 1-800 information line that they have so that farmers can connect to Diana Warwick's psychic network, so they can choose which weather station that they want to bet on, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has made a complete mockery out of the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance program. The Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, is calling for an emergency debate here this afternoon, so we can debate in this House increased coverage . . . or decreased coverage levels for farmers, increased premiums for farmers here in Saskatchewan, and a new roulette table — roulette table — for the farmers to bet on.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture stand up in this House this afternoon and debate his crop insurance program, and allow farmers in this province to know exactly the type of crop insurance program he's bringing in?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, the member from Kindersley is a joke when it comes to the farm policy. He's a joke. And I say why, Mr. Speaker. We had in Saskatchewan a Farm Support Review Committee that travelled the province and consulted about what we should do with farmers. Was the Saskatchewan Party present for any of those discussions? Absolutely void, Mr. Speaker, never see them.

The member from Kindersley stands up in March and he says . . . or in the first part of January, and he says on the radio waves, I'm going to have a Saskatchewan farm program that will be rolled out in the first part of March. And then do we see a farm program in March? Don't see a thing from the Saskatchewan Party. And then he stands up at a meeting in Moose Jaw on March 8 and he says, you know what, we're going to have a farm program for farmers right in the middle of March.

Well the middle of March has gone by and no farm program . . . (inaudible) . . . And today he wants to debate an agricultural policy in the legislature when they've been absolutely void.

You gave us AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance), you gave us CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program). None of it works. You have no understanding of farm policy in the program — none.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Northern Forest Protection Worker Training Program

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, more good news. The Minister of Post-Secondary and Skills Training and I travelled to Buffalo Narrows this morning and we signed an agreement on a new five-year firefighting program and it's to focus on the training of the next generation of Saskatchewan forest firefighters.

The northern forest protection worker training program, Mr. Speaker, will create 108 seasonal firefighting positions in 14 northern communities and deliver training needed for these jobs, Mr. Speaker. This MOU (memorandum of understanding) signed between SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) and Post-Secondary will provide \$1.14 million a . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. Order, please. Order. I would like to make it possible for all members to be able to hear the minister's statement. The minister, carry on.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, more good news.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this MOU was signed between SERM and Post-Secondary and will provide \$1.14 million in each of the five years of the agreement.

And Northlands College will deliver training that will lead to certification of northern employers and firefighters along with the communities. SERM will supervise the work crews and train them on wildfires involving fire prevention activities and engage in wildfire training and standby during high fire hazards. When the fire hazards are lower, Mr. Speaker, the crews will be under the direction of the communities and will begin to work in the communities doing a wide variety of public work projects including cleaning up many northern communities, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll point out the new north chairperson Bobby Woods, who is also the mayor of Buffalo Narrows, recognized the importance of this new program for northerners. And Bobby Woods says, I quote:

Northerners need . . . good quality long term jobs (and) this program offers (that), but they also care about their communities and (the) sustainable forest resources. Involving them directly in protection efforts makes good sense.

Mr. Speaker, great news; northerners are getting jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to respond to the minister's statement on behalf of the official opposition.

The minister's statement refers to an agreement, and it's somewhat difficult to make an assessment over all, of the program, without having a copy of that agreement, so I would ask the minister if he could possibly make that available to us as quickly as possible.

I think that we all agree that training more workers in the North in order to more professionally fight fires and allow them greater opportunity would be a good thing.

I also appreciate another component in the agreement where these people, after receiving their training, will be made available to public works communities . . . or public works departments in the various communities; and I think perhaps utilizing their skills, their expertise, on a broader basis may be something that is going to prove very beneficial.

The one concern I would have, Mr. Speaker, is that it indicates in this agreement that funding is going to be provided to a level of \$1.14 million in each year over the course of 5 years, \$5.7 million in total, Mr. Speaker. It would be interesting to know what kinds of costs are being covered with that amount of money, and are there subsidies going to be provided to the communities, wage subsidies in order for them to be able to utilize these workers in the public works departments.

And I guess the other thing that might be very interesting to see is the actual training program itself. As someone who's been involved in training programs, I think you realize they must be very comprehensive in order that people can fully benefit from the training. I mean, there are all sorts of other issues — life skills — and those sorts of things that need to be addressed as well.

So we'll be interested in looking at this agreement, Mr. Speaker, and further exploring the details of the program in the future. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 14 — The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2002

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 14, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 2002 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.

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

Mr. Boyd: — . . . Mr. Speaker, to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity under rule 46.

The Speaker: — Would the member state very briefly the

nature of the motion, please?

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Changes in Crop Insurance Premiums and Coverage

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, with the changes that the minister has announced in crop insurance, farmers will be faced with sharply higher premiums for reduced coverage, and they'll also be having to try and figure out which rainfall station to bet on here in Saskatchewan now, Mr. Speaker. So we feel it's of urgent and pressing necessity that the farmers of this province clearly understand what kind of changes the Minister of Agriculture has in mind for him and how much of a premium increase we can expect.

We call . . . that this Assembly call on the provincial government to reverse its decision to impose significantly increased premiums and reduced coverage for the 2002 crop insurance program.

Leave not granted.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. The members will come to order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — No. 1 converted.

Mr. Yates: — Convert.

The Speaker: — . . . conversion.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order, please.

Why is the member from Coronation Park on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I'd ask leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank colleagues in the legislature.

Seated behind the bar is a good friend of mine and a friend of many of us in the legislature, former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) for Regina Wascana, Clint White, who very, very ably represented that part of this great city from 1978 until 1982.

And lest anyone feel too bad about the relatively short tenure, Clint has been fond of telling me over the years I've known him that when former Premier Blakeney asked him to run, he assured him all you have to do is run and it's sort of a 28-day campaign and you won't win anyway.

Mr. White went on and acquitted himself very well in the Blakeney cabinet and made a very significant contribution to our province. So I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming an hon. friend, Clint White.

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 Mr. Prebble, seconded by Mr. Forbes.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise again today to rejoin the debate on the Throne Speech. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat again: a very good Speech from the Throne it was.

Mr. Speaker, on Friday, before I ran out of time, I had spent some time discussing Moose Jaw and all the wonderful things that are going on in the city that I've called home all my life. Mr. Speaker, there's many things ongoing and many . . . and the members here are well aware of all the good news coming out of Moose Jaw. It's a wonderful city to live in.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I noted on Friday, and I will note again today, that the difference in Moose Jaw is really the people. The people are what makes Moose Jaw a special place to live in. None of the success, none of the changes, none of the innovative ideas that are happening in Moose Jaw and continue to continue on would ever have come about if it hadn't been for the vision and dreams and the very hard work of the people in our city.

Mr. Speaker, I touched on some of the folks that lived there that are very active; Yvette Moore; Michelle Powers from Moose Jaw Tourism; Deb Thorne from the Mineral Spa; Gary Hyland, a former teacher that is very active in the community with Festival of Words and the Cultural Centre. Those are just a few of the very active citizens of Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, I also touched on Friday on the four pillars that are spoke to on the Speech from the Throne. Investment in the economy and in the environment, investment in infrastructure to build our province.

Mr. Speaker, I tried to make the point on Friday that sometimes when we view these statements in a Speech from the Throne they don't have an awful lot of meaning, so what I try and do is bring them into a context of how they affect me, how they affect my community and my neighbours.

And, Mr. Speaker, those are things that have been successful in Moose Jaw — investment in our community, in our environment; investment in our infrastructure within our province and within our city. And, Mr. Speaker, what I do is think of how they have affected my community and what effect they could have province-wide. And, Mr. Speaker, that really speaks to the vision of this government.

(14:30)

Mr. Speaker, another one of the pillars is the provision of quality education. And I made mention of the community schools in Moose Jaw — Riverview Collegiate and Empire School — who play a huge role in the community. And that idea of community schools and School^{PLUS} has been grabbed onto with much enthusiasm by the school boards, citizens, and parents of my community.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's so many things going on. I'd like to pass along a congratulations to Dr. Helen Horsman, the chairperson of the . . . and the director of education of the Moose Jaw Roman Catholic Separate School Division. The separate school division was recently honoured and won the Catholic Schools for Tomorrow award. The award was sponsored by *Today's Catholic Teacher* of Dayton, Ohio. And it's very unusual that our . . . a school division outside the United States should be recognized for the work they do. And I would like to say a congratulations to the school division in Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, there's many things that are going on in education across this province. No single item can be addressed in a single way. We have to come at it from all sides and address the multi issues that are out there in a variety of ways. And just some of the things that Saskatchewan is doing, that we're about to launch the Campus Saskatchewan — an Internet gateway to all of our post-secondary institutions offering 70 to 80 courses by the end of March 2002.

And while for you and I, Mr. Speaker, who are a little bit past our days of formal education — maybe not, but we may be — distance learning and Internet learning is absolutely made for Saskatchewan. People throughout the province, no matter how remote of a location they live in, can access the Internet through the excellent system we have through CommunityNet.

Mr. Speaker, our province has the best coverage across Canada for a province-wide . . . for this province-wide network, and it's expanding even more this year. But distance learning is suited ideally for our province. Students can remain at home. They can continue on with their employment and continue on with their education over the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, our universities have jumped up four spots higher in the *Maclean's* ranking this year. Our tuition levels are lower — less than the national average. The centennial merit scholarship program to recognize high achievement at the post-secondary level has been initiated. Three hundred scholarships will be awarded to graduating high school students, approximately covering the first year tuition costs.

Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on of the initiatives that are taking place in education across this province, and it's a huge step in building our province in the future that we have here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other pillars talks about our health care system and families. This government's commitment to renewing and improving our health care system is without a doubt a top priority, Mr. Speaker. And while this work proceeds along this province's chosen path of a publicly funded, publicly

administered system, we face challenges but we also know that maintaining our health care system is a priority.

And, Mr. Speaker, again I think of Moose Jaw and the things that are ongoing there. The Moose Jaw-Thunder Creek Health District has over the years done a remarkable job. They've provided top quality services and specialized services to Moose Jaw and the surrounding area, improved and expanded many services, and begun some very unique relationships with bordering health districts to better yet utilize the resources that are there.

And the first example that pops to mind is the mobile CT (computerized tomography) scanner, which was the first of its kind in Saskatchewan, but provided services between Moose Jaw and the Swift Current Health District and for the five health districts in the southwest corner of the province — just another way and another example of Saskatchewan citizens, how we adjust and find solutions for difficult problems.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the Thunder Creek board members have gone on to the newly expanded health authority, but others have stepped down to take on new challenges and to put back into our community in a variety of ways. But to all the present board members and the previous board members, Mr. Speaker, I would like to pass along a heartfelt thank you for all the time, effort, and dedication that they've put in over the years to provide quality service and dedication to the citizens of our district.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, health care and health determinants are important to this government. We talk about healthy and self-reliant families. Many things affect the health of children in families. Health is the result of many things: good food, adequate living accommodation, jobs, and education, just to name a few.

But when we look at the commitment by this government and topics that were addressed in the Throne Speech, expand the implementation of Kids First, a program targeted to vulnerable children, Mr. Speaker, that's very important. Children are our best resource.

Expanding the building independence, which has reduced social assistance caseloads— lots of good work has been done in this area and it continues, Mr. Speaker.

This government has made a commitment to construct 1,000 housing units for low-income families in urban and northern areas over the next five years. You can't have a healthy population, Mr. Speaker, unless you have healthy living accommodations.

Begin implementation of the action plan for Saskatchewan health care, measures to better manage waiting times for elective surgery, create primary health care teams, increase recruitment and training activities, and establish a 24-hour phone line to offer immediate advice from registered nurses — Mr. Speaker, again innovative solutions to problems that will in the end result in benefits to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, also one of the health determinants is really decent wages. That's a huge factor, Mr. Speaker. This government's announcement to increase the minimum wage by 35 cents on May 1, and another increment of 30 cents on November 1 of this year, is very important.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the opposition's view of the minimum wage increase certainly is characteristic of their view of the working poor. The opposition would hold the line on the lowest wages in the province and maintain a class of working poor.

This was revealed in a statement by the member from Humboldt in this House, in *Hansard*, June 26, 2000 when she said, and I quote:

... Kirsch Construction of Middle Lake have approximately 15 to 18 men on their payroll. They have 20 to 30 men waiting to work. These people are willing to work for less than minimum wage as long as they work. If it were not for labour legislation put in by your government, we could have a construction firm such as that complete that road.

Mr. Speaker, our government has proven that as our economy grows, all people in Saskatchewan can share in its prosperity. Not the opposition. They would have the lowest paid workers receive less than minimum wage. They would have a race for the bottom, with no protection for working poor.

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. Order.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, the opposition suggests that the government should assist those on minimum wage by decreasing taxes. And I ask, where have they been over the last few years?

I would like to remind the members present: in our budget last year through our tax reform, 55,000 low-income people came off the provincial income tax roll, the improved personal tax benefits of \$8,000, universal child and senior credits.

Mr. Speaker, the flat tax was abolished.

We introduced the Saskatchewan employment supplement which ensures that the working poor receive as much income as they would on Social Services. The extended health benefits plan ensures that working poor have the same extended health benefits that welfare recipients receive. Mr. Speaker, post-secondary bursaries have been improved for low-income families.

And, Mr. Speaker, that's not the end of the list. The sales tax credit has been introduced which provides a credit up to \$264 per family per year. This is equivalent to a tax exemption on \$4,000 in taxable purchases.

And, Mr. Speaker, we take note that sales tax does not apply to home electricity, heating, children's clothing, personal services like haircuts, or food and basic shelter. Mr. Speaker, the

essentials of life are tax free.

Low-income workers spend their money in the local economy. They do not have savings accounts; they do not travel. Therefore the more money that is put in the hands of low-income workers means more money into the local economy. It's actually good for business and will create positive spinoffs.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard much of the Crown corporations over this last week and I imagine we will continue to hear more about them as this session progresses from an opposition that is bound and determined to sell off our provincial assets.

But here again, I don't think of SaskTel or SaskEnergy as some far-off entity. I think of these Crown corporations as they are in my community — providing excellent cost-effective services in my community, providing good jobs for my neighbours in my community, purchasing goods and services whenever possible in my community, and providing sponsorships for local events in my community.

Mr. Speaker, all we have to do is look at the list. SaskPower has 2,300 employees province wide: 850 of those employees are in Regina; 1,450 employees are in 69 communities across Saskatchewan. SaskPower pays out \$432 million to 5,300 Saskatchewan companies for goods, services, royalties, and fuel. That's money and income into my constituency, and into the opposition members' constituencies also.

SaskTel has 2,200 employees in Regina, and 1,423 employees in other communities across our province; \$238 million is spent by SaskTel in more than 5,000 Saskatchewan manufacturing firms, distributors, contractors, and suppliers.

Mr. Speaker, where would those local businesses be without the support of the Crowns?

SaskEnergy has 297 employees in Regina; 687 employees in communities across our province; and \$21 million is spent on products purchased from Saskatchewan suppliers.

When we look at the Crowns as a total, Mr. Speaker, and we add them all up, there's just about 4,500 employees in Regina and 4,100 in communities throughout Saskatchewan.

An Hon. Member: — Providing good jobs.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Good jobs, paying taxes, contributing to their communities throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, that's \$519 million in employees' salaries that go back into this province, through the Crowns, into each and every one of our communities; and purchases, through the Crowns, into our communities, into our local businesses, of \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, the Crowns are an important asset that we have worked hard to maintain and to build, and it's a commitment by this government that we'll maintain the Crowns and the services that they provide throughout this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Now, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make a bit of a statement for the members across the floor.

There was a statement made the other day that the bulk of the money coming in the NDP government investment portfolio have come from two sources. The first is a \$131 billion sale of a British cable company called LCL (Leicester Communications Limited). Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish it was billion, but I don't believe it is.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to spend a few minutes and just touch on the things that are being done in my department, the Department of Labour, to improve the working conditions in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I really believe that Saskatchewan people are practical, productive, and very innovative; however we have to work together if we're going to continue to build a safe and secure future for our children, our grandchildren, and for all of Saskatchewan. And one way that that is being done is relationships that have been fostered between areas of occupational health and safety and prevention.

Mr. Speaker, my department's occupational health and safety division strives to prevent occupational injuries and illnesses. And one well-known example of this is the department's efforts to improve workplace safety through our 4,000 workplace occupational health and safety committees.

(14:45)

And another area that is receiving great emphasis is education and injury prevention. The Department of Labour and Education are helping develop classroom curriculum materials so students can learn about labour standards and occupational health and safety before they enter the workforce. A ready for work program targeted toward Saskatchewan youth is one of our most important injury prevention initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, no other age group is more vulnerable to work injuries or less knowledgeable about their workplace rights and responsibilities than our 15- to 24-year-olds. We know that 15- to 24-year-olds make up about one in every six workers in the provincial labour force, yet they account for one in four workplace injuries.

Mr. Speaker, ready for work is equipping our youth with knowledge about, and positive attitudes towards, workplace safety and injury prevention.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone here will agree that money invested in occupational health and safety and prevention is money well spent. This year marks the 30th anniversary of Saskatchewan's pioneering occupational health and safety legislation, the first of its kind in North America. After three decades it's clear, health and safety is a saving, not a cost from which everyone benefits.

Health and safety works because the average time-loss injury rate for the five-year period, 1996 to 2000, has declined by 35 per cent as compared to the five-year period, 1973 to 1977. Health and safety works because workers' compensation claims have dropped 28 per cent since 1972.

On this 30th anniversary of occupational health and safety in our province, the creation of WorkSafe Saskatchewan is a very important step forward. WorkSafe Saskatchewan is a partnership between Saskatchewan Labour and the WCB aimed at preventing occupational illnesses and injury by promoting a positive safety culture in Saskatchewan workplaces. The goal is to motivate people in the workplace to improve their health and safety standards, attitudes, and behaviours.

Now, Mr. Speaker, like the rest of Canada, Saskatchewan faces a growing demand for skilled labour. How well we meet this challenge will determine how prosperous our province will be in this coming century. A robust Saskatchewan economy must capitalize on the diverse strength of all its citizens.

Doing this means we must ensure that our workforce adapts to our changing demographics. One-quarter of all new workers entering the provincial labour force are Aboriginal.

Saskatchewan Labour is working with Aboriginal organizations, business, labour, and government agencies to develop and deliver programs that foster employee awareness and full workplace inclusion. If our province is to flourish, Aboriginal workers must be full partners in the economic and social development of Saskatchewan. This is a challenge, but also it is a great opportunity for us to seize.

Now, Mr. Speaker, a key element of a healthy economy is an efficient, effective, and accountable workers' compensation system. Our government is committed to this. And as you know, two major reviews of our Workers' Compensation Act have been done in the past 24 months.

Last May we received a report from Mr. Jim Dorsey who asked to carry . . . who was asked to carry out an administrative review of workers' compensation. He presented us with a list of recommendations aimed at improving WCB, ensuring fuller compliance with the intent of the Workers' Compensation Act, and improving WCB accountability both to me as minister responsible and to you, the stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, there was also . . . The committee of review was struck to examine and report on workers' compensation matters. The response to this committee was excellent, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased to report there was 119 thoughtful presentations from individuals and organizations put before the committee of review for its consideration.

Taken together, Mr. Dorsey's administrative review and the subsequent work of the committee of review covered the full scope of our Workers' Compensation Act. My officials and I, with the WCB's assistance, have been studying the recommendations since the report was submitted to me in January. And, Mr. Speaker, that report was released this morning.

Let me say that the fiscal stability that this government has worked so hard to bring about over the last decade will continue. And what has this fiscal stability meant to this province? Mr. Speaker, we have delivered the largest personal income tax reduction in this province's history, lowering income tax levels by almost one-third since 1993 for the average Saskatchewan family. And our 6 per cent provincial

sales tax is the lowest of all provinces that have one. Our government has also supported and stimulated small business by reducing the provincial income tax rate for small business by 40 per cent over the past 10 years.

Over the 1990s, Saskatchewan's economy outperformed every other province, including Alberta, in terms of gross domestic product on a per capita basis. That economic growth in part made these and other tax reductions possible, as did the \$3.7 billion reduction of the public debt which lessens the interest burden that Saskatchewan residents are asked to carry.

Our government is recognized nationally for good financial management, and our credit rating has been upgraded nine times since 1995. And that, Mr. Speaker, is a sign of confidence from outside partners that are . . . that our ability to manage Saskatchewan's financial affairs is stable.

The credit for these accomplishments must go to our citizens for their hard work and to the provincial government policies that are working for Saskatchewan. In the Throne Speech, our government commitment to meet this province's immediate priorities and expanding our economy. This commitment to addressing priorities and expansion needs the co-operation of Saskatchewan people to live within our means while we seize our opportunities.

We will do this by working with all Saskatchewan residents to build a province of economic opportunity and a province where the values of caring, compassion, and co-operation guide our decisions.

Despite our economic and fiscal difficulties, we see promising signs of recovery. Our long-term trend lines over the past decade have been very strong and in the last two months Saskatchewan's economy has grown by 10,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate at 6.1 per cent is the second lowest in Canada. These are the early signs of what we hope will be an economic rebound this year.

In the Throne Speech opening the spring session, we spoke of the four pillars on which we'll strengthen our province's future in the coming two to three years.

Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone to listen to these four pillars, think of them in the context of your community, and then spread the idea throughout the province: investment in economy and in the environment, investment in infrastructure to build our province, the provision of quality education, and a provision of quality health care and support to families.

Mr. Speaker, since I have had the privilege of serving as the MLA from Moose Jaw Wakamow there has never been a day go by that I have not been presently surprised and impressed by the people I have had the opportunity to meet — not only in my community, Mr. Speaker, but throughout the province, whether travelling on the bus tour or attending various functions through the province.

In Saskatchewan, there is enormous opportunity to do many things as we work our way through some difficult circumstances affecting us and our Canadian neighbours. These opportunities will be realized by following our economic and

community development plan, in partnership with industry and Saskatchewan's people that the Throne Speech has outlined.

The key to a prosperous future is to build wisely on our high quality public services, on our natural environment, and on the spirit of our citizens and our economic potential. We believe Saskatchewan is quickly becoming Canada's province of opportunity and we can meet the future with confidence and optimism knowing we are blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources.

Mr. Speaker, it's with great pleasure that I will support the Speech from the Throne.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly a pleasure to take my turn to reply to the Speech from the Throne this year. Mr. Speaker, this is an occasion where we as elected members have an opportunity to talk about our constituencies, say some thank you's to some of the people who have helped us get here, and raise the concerns of our constituents, Mr. Speaker. I intend to do that this afternoon.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly proud to represent the citizens of Last Mountain-Touchwood. I consider it an honour, Mr. Speaker, to be here to represent them, to voice their concerns, and to have a watchful eye for their well-being, Mr. Speaker.

I have on a number of occasions described the location of Last Mountain-Touchwood and I've spoken about its voting history. I think I can make claim that the citizens, the voters of Last Mountain-Touchwood are amongst the most politically aware and politically astute voters in the province.

If you look at the voting history of my constituency in the past, you will see that up until the '99 election the voters of Last Mountain-Touchwood have always sent a member to the government side of this House. And I think they did that with a purpose and they knew what they were doing.

They also knew what they were doing this time, Mr. Speaker, in 1999. They decided that they weren't going to support this government any longer, Mr. Speaker, and they didn't. They did vote with the majority of voters in this province and they were just a little bit ahead of their time. But they got it right in 1999 and the rest of the province will get it right in the next election, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have some thank you's that I should express to those people who help me every day and to those people who helped me become their elected representative.

First of all I'd like to thank my wife, Marlene, and our children for being supportive. They always pick up the slack when I'm not there. They encourage me, they provide the support that all of us know is necessary, and they make the sacrifices, Mr. Speaker, that all . . . as you well know, all our families do.

I'd also like to thank in particular our grandchildren. We have a number of grandchildren who spend a fair bit of time with us

whenever we can and when grandpa is not too busy to bring them to the farm and that sort of thing. If we have an occasion to drive by the Legislative Building, they refer to this as grandpa's big office. And they enjoy coming and visiting and so on. And they certainly brighten our lives and I would like to thank them for everything they've done for Marlene and myself.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, without also saying a thank you to my parents. They have . . . all their lives when I was growing up, our family was always politically aware with keen interest as far as what was happening on the provincial and federal scenes. And that's because my parents were . . . instilled that political awareness in us. And I think that probably played a factor in me being here today, Mr. Speaker.

Sometimes we as elected members assume that we got here on our own volition, and we will continue to do that, but when we sit back and reflect on the political process we soon realize that we can't do it by ourselves. We have those hard-working men and women in our constituencies who are part of our constituency organization who go to meetings, put up the signs at election time, help organize and run fundraising functions, and so on. And they do this for no personal gain, and I think we should be thanking them. And I would like to thank all those people who have helped me and continue to help me, Mr. Speaker.

Another person that I would like to thank at this time is my very able constituency assistant, Carol Mellnick, who works tirelessly in my office, who keeps me on track — and that's no small task, Mr. Speaker — keeps me organized, provides me with the information, and does a good part of our day-to-day constituency work.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I've been very fortunate to be one of the members who were selected to participate in the legislative intern program. I was very fortunate to have a young lady, Maria Kurylo, one of our interns working with me for the last two and a half months. And I must say, Mr. Speaker, it has certainly been a very pleasurable experience, and I must . . . she's certainly helped me with some of the things I'm going to present in my speech this afternoon. All the good things are her work. If I stumble and mess up, that's my fault, Mr. Speaker. So I would like to thank her.

Mr. Speaker, when I was preparing this address for this afternoon, I looked at constituency concerns and I looked at the notes I made last year. And, Mr. Speaker, not much has changed. Basically the concerns of this last 12 months are the same as what they were in the past. They centre around health, health care; I receive a number of inquiries and complaints from municipal governments dealing with infrastructure; and from citizens of the constituency and other citizens that I meet with on occasion, and they're concerned about government interference in the economy.

(15:00)

And of course agriculture's . . . is always a constant concern. And particularly more so now in the last week or so since the Minister of Agriculture announced his . . . the changes to the crop insurance program. The drought is a constant concern with

the farm producers in the constituency, particularly the lack of snow for runoff and for moisture for this year's crop. A number of . . . a large number of farmers have gone ahead and dug wells and had dugouts dug, but we need snow, Mr. Speaker, for runoff for livestock and for farm use.

One of the concerns I hear on a regular basis is, farmers tell me, well we've got snow . . . enough snow in our area to get a crop going but we don't know where we're going to get the water to spray, Mr. Speaker. Because if we don't get any significant snow between now and May 1, we're just not going to have any water. It's going to be a real problem, Mr. Speaker.

In the area of health, the issues that are most commonly raised, and would come as no surprise, are the long waiting lists for elective surgery. People are paying for their own MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging); they're going off to Calgary or Edmonton and having their MRIs done so that they can perhaps move up a bit in the waiting lists.

I had a neighbour of mine who was waiting for quite a number of months for cataract surgery. It was to the point where he could . . . his sight was . . . He had a problem with his sight to the point where he couldn't legally drive so his wife and himself went off this summer to Calgary, he had the operation done, and it cost him \$2,500, and he was able to drive home. He said he'd waited long enough and he couldn't carry on any longer so he took matters into his own hands.

Another area of concern in the health area are the services that we have in the form of hospitals in the constituency. There's a hospital, a small hospital, in Lestock; a little larger hospital by rural terms in Wynyard; and of course we . . . and then we have the Cupar Health Centre. And the people living in these communities are concerned about and then are asking the questions, will these facilities be there in the future to provide the services that we need, Mr. Speaker?

There is a bit of an anomaly, I guess, with the creation of these new regional health authorities in my constituency. The Living Sky District was part of . . . is now part of the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority. Well that Living Sky Health District covered an area that came south along Last Mountain Lake down to Strasbourg. Strasbourg is approximately 45 miles from Regina but now that area is in the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority, in their area.

You would wonder, when the government was making these changes to boundaries, why they wouldn't have looked at the boundaries that are . . . that they put in place and rationalized them so that the people in Strasbourg would come to Regina, Mr. Speaker.

Also the make-up of that Saskatoon Regional Health Board . . . The people in my constituency are concerned of the make-up, the number of people coming from Saskatoon versus the number of people in rural Saskatchewan.

One of the areas, as I'd mentioned, that I get a lot of inquiries, complaints, and disappointments, I guess, is the whole area of infrastructure. Towns and villages, RMs (rural municipality) — they're all the same. They all . . . they're just not getting enough money to provide the infrastructure that they need in their

jurisdictions. The towns and villages apply year after year after year and are turned down. The odd one does get an approval, but the number that are turned down far outweigh the number that are successful under this program.

As an example, the Town of Wynyard is constantly struggling to provide enough water for their citizens and for the processing plant that they have in their community. They have wells . . . number of wells. I believe the number is 14 or 15 wells. And still I'm told that it's just . . . it's on a day-to-day basis whether there's enough water there. The poultry processing plant in that community requires a great deal of fresh clean water for their processing activities, and the Town of Wynyard is having real problems.

Another community that's having . . . that would like to improve and provide some additional services in their community, particularly emergency services, is the village of Kelliher. That village, Kelliher, bought a standby power plant at a great saving. They got quite a deal on it. They were able to buy this almost new power plant. And what they would like to do is they would like to install that plant in the waiting room of their rink.

And in case of an emergency, if we had something to the equivalent of the ice storm that Eastern Canada suffered a number . . . a couple of years ago, they would be able to power up their, not only their waiting rooms but they'd be able to power up their water system and their sewer, sewage system if . . . And they've got the plant; all they need is some assistance to get this thing installed, to get it wired up. And I've been working with them and, to this point in time, we haven't been successful. And I think it's a very deserving project that needs to be looked at.

More recently, Mr. Speaker, in fact within the last couple of days, I've made aware of the village of Elfros has . . . their well has gone dry. They drilled a new well at a cost of \$30,000 last August; they thought they had all kinds of water, and to their great disappointment, about four days ago that well went dry. They are now hauling water of some . . . a round trip, I'm told, of 40 miles at a cost of approximately \$1,500 a day.

They have a well driller on site. They drilled a test hole down to a depth of 400 feet. It's a dry hole. It cost them \$2,000. They've now moved to another location. I talked to the councillor in charge just at noon, and he tells me they're down about 200 feet, still haven't hit water. They're hopeful they will, but there's no guarantees. And if they don't hit water in this location, frankly, they don't know what they're going to do, Mr. Speaker.

They are facing a very, very serious problem, and they cannot afford that \$1,500 a day for water, Mr. Speaker. So I've been in discussion with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and hopefully, we will be able to . . . this government will be able to find some assistance for them.

Another area of constituency concern again centres in the Wynyard area. There's a group of families who have family members with disabilities. The families are looking after them and, as you could well know, Mr. Speaker, that this is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week job if you want to put it in those

terms. And these people are crying out for some help, a respite home where they could take their family members and have a bit of a break for a day or two, Mr. Speaker. And to this point in time we haven't been successful.

As I mentioned, one . . . and the area of concern that we hear all the time is the invasion of this government into the economy, competing with private business. And this is a concern, Mr. Speaker, that goes across the piece. It's not only in the constituency of Last Mountain-Touchwood, it's in . . . all across the province, Mr. Speaker.

And these people, this NDP government just don't seem to get the . . . see the picture, Mr. Speaker because I'm afraid they have their minds made up; it's only their way to develop an economy. And Mr. Speaker, I can say — and I think the people of Saskatchewan will agree with me — that it's not working.

We just have to look at the financial situation that this government finds itself in, and on Wednesday's budget that'll be very evident, Mr. Speaker.

I had a local merchant who called me just when the new tobacco regulations were . . . came into effect and he was very upset. He said all the onus rests with the merchant; he has all the responsibility. He has incurred all the costs, and yet the offenders, the young people who are buying cigarettes illegally, there's no repercussions. He felt this is very unfair, that it should be a balance, Mr. Speaker. He's certainly willing to do his part, Mr. Speaker, and control the sale of tobacco products. But he feels that the young people that . . . who illegally purchase these products should be . . . there should be some repercussions that come to bear on them, Mr. Speaker.

Another unique situation I was made aware of just recently is that . . . the area of the activities of Crown corporations. It appears, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this NDP government is putting such a financial squeeze on the Crowns, to squeeze out more dollars so that they can balance their budgets, that the Crown corporations are now squeezing their customers. They're forcing people to . . . if they've got a power installation on an abandoned farm site, they're . . . it's either hook . . . get that power hooked up and pay us some dollars or else we're going to come in there and rip it out. And these people aren't getting a whole lot of warning ahead of time, Mr. Speaker.

So I guess this is balancing the budget, NDP style.

The other . . . As I mentioned, this whole area of government, of this NDP government competing with private business, was made very clear to me by a constituent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may have . . . may recall that last week I did a member's statement on the move of this large grain annex in . . . that took place in the beginning of March in my constituency. And I mentioned that a young farmer by the name of Robert Keyser purchased it and had the elevator moved.

Well I'll tell you what really upset Rob Keyser. He . . . Rob and his dad, over the last number of years, set up a pulse processing plant on their farm. And they'd grown their business to the point where they're hiring, at peak operation times, anywhere up to 15 people. So they're a job creator. Rob has taken over the management of this operation.

And you know what upset Rob, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is last fall when this NDP government went and provided taxpayers' dollars to one of his competitors. He phoned me; he was very, very upset. And as a matter of fact, the reason why he was more upset than normal is that during the bus tour — this NDP bus tour that the members opposite like to talk about, the Minister of Social Services and the member from Greystone and the member from Regina Dewdney made a special trip out to Rob's farm to talk to him, to listen to his ideas, hear his concerns and they said they were listening. Well I don't think they listened very well because, only a month later, here they go hand the taxpayers' dollars to one of his competitors, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So here we have a young farmer . . . a young businessman who was making substantial investment in this province and what position does he find himself in? He's got to compete with his own tax dollars, Mr. Speaker. But that's not a great surprise, Mr. Speaker, with the economic development policies of this government.

Now I read with . . . listened with interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the section in the Speech from the Throne that dealt with the NDP bus tour and the listening and learning. And I've already given you one example of how the NDP members did not listen and certainly didn't learn anything from that tour.

But I have another story that was related to me by a local businessman in another community. This business person operates a pretty decent-sized car dealership, another job creator. The NDP bus pulled into the community. The Premier was on the bus, along with a number of cabinet members and MLAs and they were, of course, going out and supposedly talking and listening to the people.

It was arranged for the Premier to come and visit this business person. So as the story goes, the Premier walks into the office, to the private office, sits in the chair, introduces himself, sits in the chair and says to the owner: well Daryl, what's on your mind? And Daryl was just going to start telling the Premier what's on his mind. An aide rushes in, Mr. Premier, we've got to go. Nice to meet you Daryl, we'll see you again. That's listening and learning, Mr. Speaker, NDP style; listening and learning. And it's very evident that they did neither listen nor neither did they learn.

An Hon. Member: — Must have been time for a photo op.

Mr. Hart: — Exactly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nothing more than a photo op.

The members opposite, they like to criticize the Grow Saskatchewan meetings that our caucus held earlier this month. I would like to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the people that attended our meetings, they had an opportunity to present their ideas, to interact with the MLAs that were at the meetings, and this process ran anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours — not two minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(15:15)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to turn my attention now to the area of post-secondary education. I read with interest the one

sentence in the Speech from the Throne, and I'll quote: "Saskatchewan's commitment to post-secondary education will also be maintained."

Well what does that mean: the commitment will also be maintained? I'm sure that gives our universities, our students, a lot of comfort when they hear that their commitment will be maintained. I listened last Friday with interest to the Minister of Post-Secondary Education's reply to the Speech from the Throne. And I must say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that her staff did quite a good job in preparing her speech for her. She outlined the mandates of the universities and talked about the type of vision that our universities should have and so on. And I can find no fault with that.

She also mentioned though, particularly at the University of Saskatchewan, that we have a number of colleges that deal in the health care area, whether it's the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing, and one college she mentioned was the Vet College. And the University of Saskatchewan is unique by having all of these colleges there.

But what I was listening for — and I'm sure the dean of the Veterinary College and other people associated along with the administration of the University of Saskatchewan, what they would have liked to hear — was a commitment to funding that university, the Vet College, because there are some problems there.

This college is funded through an agreement with the other western provinces and to my knowledge that agreement has not been renewed. And there's some real major concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there.

Now getting back to this comment of the commitment will be maintained. What does that mean? Well last year the universities and SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology) saw an increase in their operating revenue of three and a half per cent. What is it going to be this year?

The message that we're hearing on this side of the House from the government is that in all likelihood it's not going to be anywhere near that. The three and a half per cent last year wasn't adequate. It wasn't adequate to meet the needs of the university, so the universities had no other alternative but to increase tuition fees — a 15 per cent increase in tuition fees.

So is that what our students are looking at again? Another increase in tuition fees of 15 per cent or more? Is that what we mean by maintaining our commitment, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I'm sure that gives our students a lot of comfort.

Last year after the budget was presented, I looked very closely and during estimates I investigated the number of dollars that the universities received, new dollars, and the number of new dollars that the students provided to the universities by the way of increased tuition fees.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the students gave the universities more new money than this government did. And I think that is shameful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, shameful. That means higher student debt at a time when our students already have a debt

load that they can hardly maintain.

So if we see anything less than a 4 per cent increase in funding to our post-secondary education institutions this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it'll mean higher student debt — higher tuition fees and higher student debt for our students.

What our post-secondary education institutions tell me they need — they need a commitment to stable, long-term funding. And that's something that this government isn't prepared to do. Well I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a Saskatchewan Party government would be prepared to make that commitment and we will make it after the next election, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — I was pleased, however, with the reference in the Speech from the Throne to the Canadian Light Source. Again, in typical NDP fashion, it's a day late and a dollar short, but at least they did make a commitment to establish a Saskatchewan synchrotron institute. This is something that I spoke in this House last session; it's something that the Alberta government has put in place well over a year ago, and finally maybe — maybe — this government is going to put a Saskatchewan synchrotron institute into place.

The president, Peter MacKinnon, at the University of Saskatchewan tells me that he's travelled to a number of universities throughout the world that had light . . . synchrotrons located on their campuses. And he's being told over and over again by those people that the universities must be a major user of that scientific installation. If not, the city, the province, and the university will not reap the benefits of having a scientific installation such as the synchrotron located on campus.

So the question is this: is this NDP government prepared to make the investment so that this province will reap the benefits of that Canadian Light Source that's being built at the University of Saskatchewan as we speak?

I am somewhat fearful that they aren't prepared and they can't make that type of investment, simply because they've mismanaged the economy so badly that they just don't have the dollars to put into . . . to make that kind of investment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I hope that I am proven wrong.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to turn my comments to agriculture. There's many more . . . there's a lot more I could say about post-secondary education and the students and the number of students that are leaving our province and so on, but perhaps I'll save some of those comments for the budget address, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Within the last few weeks the Minister of Agriculture has announced the particulars of the 2002 crop insurance program. And to the dismay of all farmers of Saskatchewan, this government says one thing but does something else. And I will demonstrate exactly what this government — this NDP (New Democratic Party) government — has done to the farmers of Saskatchewan.

But prior to getting into the crop insurance explanation and showing the effects of the changes that this year's program will

have, the dramatic and devastating effects it will have, I'd just like to say . . . mention a few things about some of the areas of concern in agriculture. And as I had said earlier, the drought is certainly . . . the ongoing drought is certainly a problem.

Another area of concern in my constituency, and I'm sure in other constituencies across the province, comes from the elk producers, those farmers who made a significant investment in diversifying their farms and now with the arrival of chronic wasting disease in the province, they are between a rock and a hard place. There's no sale for their animals, the product of their animals, yet they have all the costs.

I had a producer in my constituency tell me that if this thing doesn't get turned around and if it doesn't rain in the spring, he has no alternative but to shoot his animals that he has on his farm right now. I think that's a terrible situation. But the silence on this issue from the members on the other side of the House is deafening, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, the changes in crop insurance, to this year's crop insurance, are quite devastating. And as soon as I can find my example, I will take you through an example to show you as to how it affects . . .

I have it here. Okay. I'll try to explain from a producer's viewpoint and from a . . . as to why the changes that this government has put in place for the 2002 crop year, why they're so devastating.

First of all I should mention, though, that earlier in the day when we on this side of the House felt that we should have an emergency debate on the changes . . . to the changes of crop insurance and we asked for leave to have that emergency debate, who over there on that side hollered no?

Well I was watching, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you know who hollered no? It was the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the Minister of Agriculture. That's what he thinks about the farmers of Saskatchewan, that he won't even devote half a day to debate such an important topic, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I don't know if he even understood the question, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might ask the question, one might ask the question, why, why is it so important or why is this change particularly to the spot loss hail . . . loss of the spot loss hail option, why is that so devastating to the producers of this province?

In order to understand that, I guess what I should do at this time is explain how the average producer looks at insuring his crop for a loss, whether that be through a loss through drought, whether it be loss through frost, whether it be loss through insect damage, or whether it be loss through hail.

And this is . . . their losses are different for everything . . . Let me phrase it this way. The risk of loss through hail is different than the risk of loss through all the other things that can attack and damage a crop. If you have a drought, it's generally within an area or it's more widespread. It'll affect a whole region of

the province as we saw this year. If you have a frost, quite often it'll affect a larger area. Insects, generally, they just don't affect a portion of a field; they'll affect a whole section or at least a whole field and that sort of thing.

So that's why you need to have different risk management tools at your disposal. And that's why farmers enrol in crop insurance for the multi-peril risk to look after the things like loss due to frost, drought, insect damage and so on, and all those others things.

But hail . . . the loss due to hail is . . . it's . . . the risk is entirely different. It's not uncommon to have a portion of a field — and I'll use a field size of even half a quarter, 80 acres — where the north half of that field can be hit by a hailstorm and you can lose 60, 70 per cent of that. And right on the south end of that field there's no damage. That's the nature of hail. It'll hail on one side and you'll have damage to a crop on one side of the road; on the other side, the crop is untouched. And anyone who's farmed for more than one or two years, and farms in an area where hail is a problem will . . . can tell you that. It's no big secret, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So that's why it's so important to many farmers in this province that the . . . they have a program where they can insure a crop against the multi-perils of drought, frost, and those sorts of things. But also they have to carry, carry spot loss hail insurance because there are many farmers who the greatest risk to their crop is due to the loss of hail.

I myself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first time I signed up for crop insurance was when they included — way back in the 80's, I believe it was — when they included the spot loss hail. That's when I first brought . . . brought crop insurance.

I had . . . I was in conversation with a number of farmers on the weekend and they told me the same thing. They said, the first time they bought crop insurance was when the spot loss hail was . . . (inaudible) . . . You know when they're going to get rid of it? They're going to get rid of it this year if they can afford to do it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now for those members opposite who neither understand nor had any experience with insuring crops for loss, I'd like to go through an example to illustrate why it's so important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that spot loss hail option be put back into this year's crop insurance program.

What I have before me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an actual example of a crop insurance contract in district 11. As my colleague, the member from Kindersley indicated earlier today, these numbers apply to a farm in the Raymore-Cupar area because they're in that risk area.

This is . . . these are numbers from an actual crop insurance contract. They're not pulled out of the air. And I will go through it in some detail, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that the . . . hopefully the members opposite . . . and particularly the Minister of Agriculture who stood in his place today and hollered over at us and said, we just don't get it, we just don't get it.

Well we get it. We get it and so are all of the farmers of this

province going to get it. And you know where they're going to get it? If this doesn't change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they're going to get it in some . . . in an area that I can't even mention in this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But now, I'm hoping . . . I don't see the Minister of Agriculture in the House this afternoon. I'm hoping that he's at least listening in his office and if he isn't, I would be more than happy to sit down and . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — . . . point out the absence or presence of other members in the House. So I'd ask the member to come to order.

(15:30)

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Okay. If those members who care to have an interest and understand how these changes are going to affect the farmers of this province this year, I will explain it to them. Because we do get it, and hopefully they will get it after I've explained it to them. And as I said these are numbers that are from a 2001 crop insurance contract. So they're not fictitious. These are real numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This particular contract, there was 1,475 acres of crop insured under this program. They were made up . . . and I will go through each crop with the appropriate number so that hopefully people can understand — those people opposite can understand.

And the reason I chose this contract is because it reflects what's actually happening out in rural Saskatchewan. I could have taken a contract, I could have looked around and talked to my constituents and found a contract that would greatly exaggerate the situation. But I felt that we should present a fair and unbiased example so that hopefully these people will understand.

So, as I said, these are real numbers. Under this contract, this producer had 285 acres of spring wheat insured, and these are all insured at the 70 per cent option so that this producer could then have the spot loss hail, which he paid a premium for; so on those 285 acres, the producer had \$23,710 worth of insurance.

Now I should mention that that is crop insurance and it's also the number that is used for the spot loss hail. So now that producer paid premium, the crop insurance portion of the . . . And when I say crop insurance I'm referring to all those . . . that premium that covers all those types of losses, like drought and frost and so on. And the hail, spot loss hail premium is another separate premium. And I will give you those numbers.

The crop insurance premium was \$474 on those 285 acres. And these are the producer's . . . what the producer paid, by the way. These are the dollars that the producer actually paid. The spot loss hail premium was \$232 for a total premium on those 285 acres of spring wheat — crop insurance plus hail insurance — total premium was \$706.

The next crop that's listed on that contract is barley. This producer had 230 acres of barley insured at a value . . . and its crop insurance value was \$16,435. He paid a crop insurance

premium of \$394 and a hail insurance premium of \$169 for a total of \$563 on those 230 acres of barley.

Oats, 265 acres insured for a coverage of \$14,030; premiums — crop insurance 395, the hail portion 144, for a total of \$539. Oh, canola, 120 acres, value of insurance 10,260; the premium on the crop insurance portion 282, hail portion 199, for a total of 481. Desi chickpeas, 235 acres, value of the crop insurance coverage \$25,100; premium \$1,440 for the crop insurance portion, \$516 for the hail insurance, for a total premium on those 235 acres of desi chickpeas of \$1,956. I'm getting to the end, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It won't be too much longer on this example.

Lentils, 245 acres, value of insurance \$32,680; crop insurance premium is \$1,052. The spot loss hail premium was 672 for a total premium on those 245 acres of lentils of \$1,724. Kabuli chickpeas, 95 acres — crop insurance coverage 19,655; the premium for the crop insurance portion, \$1,230, the hail . . . spot loss hail premium, \$404 for a total premium of \$1,634.

So now the totals. Under this contract this producer had, as I mentioned earlier, 1,475 acres insured, made up of the various crops as I've mentioned for . . . and the total value of that . . . of the coverage of crop insurance on that contract was \$141,870, of which the premium breaks down this way: the total crop insurance portion of the premium was 5,267, the spot loss hail premium on that total contract was 2,336, for a total premium payable . . . and if you don't . . . didn't remember any other number that I've told you . . . said up until now, remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this number of the total premium that this producer paid, was \$7,603. That's what this producer paid for that . . . to . . . for that crop insurance contract in 2001. Then what the producer did is, once he heard the Minister of Agriculture's announcement of changes to this . . .

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

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for providing me a moment to introduce some special guests who have travelled quite some distance to join us this afternoon.

I'd like to introduce in your gallery, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two members of the Greek Parliament and the spouse and the local chaperone for today. But we are joined in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by Savas Tsitouridis, and his wife, Maria. Mr. Tsitouridis is a member of the New Democracy Party and a member of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs in Greece, a member of the Greek Parliament.

He's also joined by Mr. Pithagoras Vardikos, a member of the ruling PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Party) Party and a member of the Standing Committee on Cultural and Educational Affairs, a member of parliament in the Greek

Parliament. And they are joined by a local face that'll be familiar to many, Mr. Thomas Siarkos, who is owner of the Memories restaurant.

We are very pleased to have them join us. They're here on the occasion of visiting the Greek community here, in Saskatchewan, to celebrate the 181st anniversary of the independence of Greece. We will all recognize in this House not only the strong and proud traditions in our world related to Olympic events, but also the long and proud traditions of democracy that are part of the heritage that the world's inherited from Greece.

And, Mr. Speaker, I would ask all hon. members to join in bidding a special welcome to these guests here, today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Julé: — . . . to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party official opposition, I am pleased to extend a warm *kalo sariste sto Saskatchewan* to the Greek Parliamentarians; Savas Tsitouridis and his wife, Maria, to Pithagoras Vardikos and to our good friend Thomas Siarkos from Memories Fine Dining here in Regina.

Over the years, Mr. Siarkos, Mr. Salinas, their fine chefs and staff have provided members of our caucus with some delectable and most delicious meals. And I trust that Mr. Siarkos will relay to the Greek parliamentarians visiting Saskatchewan my personal gratitude for the wonderful hospitality that I received from members of the Greek communities while in Parlion Astros and Agios Petros in Greece during my visit there four years ago.

Greece is a most magnificent country, compelling in its history, its beauty and the strength of its citizens. We in Saskatchewan feel blessed to have members of the Greek community in our midst as part of our multicultural mosaic. Congratulations on the celebration of your 181st anniversary of the independence of Greece. We hope that you will enjoy your visit here in Saskatchewan.

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 Mr. Prebble, seconded by Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now we will return to the crop insurance lesson. And the last thing I said, Mr. Speaker, was that this producer paid in the fall of 2001 a crop

insurance premium, all premiums in total of \$7,603. So now what the producer did just a few days ago, sat down and applied the new rules as best he could based on the limited information that's available and . . . to the 2001 contract to see what kind of costs this producer would have in 2002.

So the only change that this producer did in the calculation is to . . . as the Minister of Agriculture has said, the spot loss hail option is no longer available in crop insurance. So what does the producer do that has . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's zap, it's gone. Exactly.

So the producer has no . . . has to go out and purchase spot loss hail from private insurance company. Well, in fact, this producer did top up some . . . on some crops, top up some of his spot loss hail because, on some of the crops like the desi chickpeas and the kabuli chickpeas and even the lentils, this producer felt that he needed some additional insurance. So he actually went out and purchased additional insurance. So he knew . . . he knows exactly what it cost from last year and he applied those costs to replacing the loss of spot loss hail.

So now let's have a look at how this has affected him. On the spring wheat, instead of paying 200 . . . and what he has done, he's merely replaced those . . . that insurance that he lost. He's not topping up anything. So at the end of the calculation he will have exactly the same dollars worth of insurance as he had in 2001, but the calculation is done under the new rules.

So on the spring wheat, instead of paying \$232 for spot loss hail, he now has to pay \$1,280 in premium. On the barley, this 230 acres of barley to replace the spot loss hail, instead of paying \$169 he has to pay \$888. On the oats, instead of paying \$144, Mr. Speaker, he has to pay \$758 in hail premiums.

On the canola instead of paying \$199 for spot loss hail under Crop Insurance, by having to go and buy from private companies, he would pay, instead of \$199, he would pay \$942 for exactly the same coverage, Mr. Speaker.

It even gets worse, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the Desi chickpeas he paid a hail premium of \$516. To replace that spot loss hail by buying it through private companies he would pay a premium of \$2,304, Mr. Speaker.

On the lentils the producer paid \$672 for spot loss hail through Crop Insurance. By having to . . . by being forced to buy it through private insurance he pays a premium of 2,470.

On the Kabuli chickpeas he paid a hail premium through Crop Insurance of \$404. By buying it privately, \$1,804, Mr. Speaker.

So now instead of paying a hail . . . a spot loss hail premium of 2,336, he will now this year have to pay \$10,446. If you look at the net costs by subtracting out last year's premium, he's looking at an increased cost of \$8,110 or about \$5.50 an acre additional cost for no additional coverage.

That's a cost, Mr. Speaker, that farmers cannot afford to pay. If we're looking at a drought, Mr. Speaker . . . Now if this farmer, the owner of this contract, if he decided that he's not going to diversify his farm and go back to the traditional crops, he could lower his costs of hail insurance. But he would certainly lower

his income because it's the specialty crops that have the higher prices, provide the greater portion of income; and it's the specialty crops where there's a surcharge on the hail insurance premium. It ranges from one and a half to one and three-quarters, and in past years it was twice the basic rate.

So in this calculation the producer, his base premium cost for the cereal grains — wheat, barley, and oats — the premium rate was 5.4 per cent for those crops. But when you look at crops like chickpeas and lentils and canola, there's a surcharge. For the chickpeas and the canola the surcharge in this case was 1.7 times the basic rate. So the producer was, instead of paying 5.4 per cent premium rate, he was paying well over 9 per cent — so therefore the high cost, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

(15:45)

So when you do the calculation, and you compare apples with apples, this producer, if he seeds exactly the same crops in 2002, and seeds them on the same land, he would incur an increase in crop loss premiums of over 200 per cent — 206 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And this is a . . . As I said earlier, this is a cost that farmers cannot afford to pay.

But, Mr. Speaker, we constantly hear from the Minister of Agriculture, and the Premier, and the members opposite, it's the federal government's fault — it's the federal government. That was the whole gist of the Minister of Agriculture's answers to our questions today. It's the federal government's fault. I don't know how he didn't manage to work in that it was also the Devine government's fault. He missed that one, but . . . so what he did . . . he blamed it on the federal government.

Well what are the effects of these changes to crop insurance, Mr. Speaker? I mentioned earlier that this contract holder paid \$2,336 in crop insurance premiums. Well the total premium for that contract was 5,000 . . . the spot loss hail portion of that contract . . . the total premium was \$5,840, of which the producer paid 2,336, the Government of Saskatchewan paid 1,752, and the province of Saskatchewan paid 1,752, and the Government of Saskatchewan paid the same . . . of Canada — sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Government of Canada paid \$1,752 to pay this crop . . . this spot loss hail premium.

So what is the effect of removing this spot loss hail option? This government is allowing the federal government to withdraw its dollars out of Saskatchewan. They keep talking about the federal government has to put more money into agriculture, and they're giving them a vehicle to withdraw their dollars.

We saw . . . the farmers of this province have seen this before. We saw it when they tore up the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contract. That allowed the federal government to take millions of dollars out of this province, and I'm afraid that situation is the same, Mr. Speaker.

It appears that this government is intent on balancing their budget. The Romanow government balanced its budget on the backs of farmers when it tore up the GRIP contract. The Calvert government is doing the same by gutting crop insurance.

The Speaker: — Order. I'd remind the member that any

reference to other members should be by their title, or by their constituency, and not by their name.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. History is repeating itself.

Now the other thing is, so what have we got now? We've got the spot loss hail option removed from crop insurance. So now that the federal government is saving some money, the provincial government is saving an equal amount, and the producer is paying a whole lot more.

But the story doesn't end there, Mr. Speaker, because now the farmers will be forced — and they will — they will go and buy the hail insurance because in many areas of this province hail is the greatest risk of crop loss and farmers will insure for that. So they will go and buy from the private companies. So the provincial government is a winner again because, Mr. Speaker, there is a 3 per cent premium tax on hail insurance premiums paid.

So therefore this government's not only saves money by having to put less money in crop insurance but they're going to collect more money on premium tax, Mr. Speaker. And all that money is being paid . . . is coming out of the pockets of our farmers, Mr. Speaker.

So now that I've explained it, hopefully some of the members opposite will understand it. I know all the members on this side, I didn't have to explain it, because they understood it. In fact many of them will be living this and be paying these higher bills, Mr. Speaker.

So what did the Minister of Agriculture and his NDP government offer as a replacement, Mr. Speaker, to these changes? Well they offered a couple of brand new options under crop insurance. They offered the forage rainfall program and they offered the annual crop program. And we heard it referred to earlier today as the rainfall roulette program. And that's exactly what it is — rainfall roulette, Mr. Speaker.

As my colleague from Kindersley explained during question period, the farmers have the option of insuring their forage or their annual crops and picking a weather station. And basically you can pick any weather station. There's, I believe, there's about 40 weather stations across the province. So I can imagine the farmers who may want to look at this, who have a bit of a gambling nature to them — and farmers are gamblers, that's a nature of the business — they may take this map, blow it up, put in on a wall, and throw a dart, Mr. Speaker. And wherever that dart lands, that's the weather station they'll pick because there's no logic, there's no scientific way of doing this, you may as well just throw the dart.

So I can imagine that perhaps, I don't know, I haven't been talking to any of the people they have in place to market this new program, I think they're probably all in training and getting their outfits; they're getting their carnay outfits and they're getting their maps with the balloons. And they're getting to learn the carnay lingo — put your money . . . step right up ladies and gentlemen. Put your money down. Throw a dart and see if you're going to be a big winner this year. I'm sure that's what's happening out there. Wouldn't surprise me, Mr. Speaker.

Basically it's a joke. The options, the new options are a joke, and the farmers are saying that — it's a joke.

What are some of the farm leaders saying? And I'd like to read this quote from the March 13 *Leader-Post*. Terry Hildebrandt, president of Agriculture Producers Association of Saskatchewan, termed the program a major disappointment. That's what some of the . . . the other farm leaders are expressing the same, same sort of disappointment with this new program.

I should mention, Mr. Speaker, that even their own supporters, their own dyed-in-the-wool, long-time NDP supporters aren't supporting these changes. I recently talked to some of those dyed-in-the-wool NDP supporters who have always voted NDP, will continue to vote NDP, and will never change the way they vote. And you know what they told me? The Minister of Agriculture made a huge mistake — a huge mistake. It's a joke, the new options.

And I'm afraid these people will see the results of these changes that they made next time we're called to the polls, Mr. Speaker.

So why . . . so then that leads me to the question, Mr. Speaker: why would the government do this? Why would they gut one of the main planks of support to the farmers of this province? Why would they do that?

Well I think the question is pretty evident. If we look at the results of the last election and if you talk, I'm sure if you talk to the people who were on the bus and get their true analysis of what they heard out there, they know that they're not going to get any support in rural Saskatchewan so they've just simply written them off. They've written them off. They don't care about Saskatchewan. The people in rural Saskatchewan, the farmers, they didn't vote for us, so we're going to do it to them every time we can.

And that's exactly what they've done. They're balancing their budgets on the backs of our farmers, Mr. Speaker.

But this is causing . . . As I've indicated, I've demonstrated the additional costs that farmers are forcing. But there's another dimension to this whole change, and it's putting the farmers between a rock . . . some of our farmers between a rock and a hard place, Mr. Speaker. Because I've already demonstrated that many farmers are . . . they have to buy the crop . . . or hail and spot loss hail insurance because that's the greatest risk. Many farmers tell me that they get hail damage to their crops one in three years, Mr. Speaker. And so therefore they're going to insure for that risk.

But also, for those farmers who want to take advantage of the spring cash advance program, they have to buy crop insurance. You cannot qualify for the spring cash advance program unless you hold a crop insurance contract. So for those farmers . . . these would be the farmers who could least afford it, they're faced . . . they're looking at their limited dollars and they're saying okay, what do I do with my limited dollars? Do I put them into spot loss hail or do I put into crop insurance?

Well now, if they find themselves that they need that additional operating money that this government hailed a couple of years

ago as a huge gift to Saskatchewan farmers . . . it's a loan program, that's all it is. So if they want to take advantage of that program they have to buy the crop insurance.

As I've said, some of them will be looking at costs of 200 per cent and possibly more in their operating costs. And those are the very farmers that can't afford to incur those kinds of cost, Mr. Speaker.

Now wouldn't \$25 million that was lost in SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company) . . . I would think that would pay for a lot of spot loss hail premiums. But what do these people do? They give their smart boys — the people with the shiny suits and the shiny shoes — and say here, take some Monopoly money and go out and play Monopoly. See if you can buy Park Place or Boardwalk or whatever. And if you lose 5 or \$6 million or \$28 million, it's no big deal. Well it is a big deal. It's a real big deal. It's a big deal to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion . . . I know that the members are riveted opposite and I'd like to continue on but I know there's members of our caucus that would like to have their opportunity.

The question is, how did we derive at this place in time and in this financial crunch that we find ourselves in? Well how did we go from last year having a surplus of \$840 million to this year, the Provincial Auditor and the bond rating companies and I think even the Minister of Finance, will finally admit that we're looking at a half a billion dollar deficit.

And how did we get there in a short period of time? Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you how we got there. This government has never had a plan; they have no vision; they govern from day-to-day, putting out fires. It's crisis management, Mr. Speaker, and it's no wonder that we find ourselves in this dire financial situation.

They have no idea how to grow the economy. They're committed, they're tied, to the idea that we can do everything through government, through Crown corporations, and it's not working.

It seems to me that someone said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. And I think that's what these people are doing. They're expecting different results and it's not going to happen, Mr. Speaker.

But I'll tell you who has the plan, Mr. Speaker — we on this side of the House; the Saskatchewan Party has a plan. We have a plan to grow this province by 100,000 people in the next 10 years, to create jobs, to create . . . to have more taxpayers so that we have money to fund the things that we need to do, whether it be crop insurance, whether it be post-secondary education, whether it be health care, whether it be . . . provide the social workers that we need.

What do these people do? Last year they hire 571 people . . . more government workers; this year they're going to fire them. That's the result of no planning, Mr. Speaker.

So therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment . . . the motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to address the House with a reply to the Throne Speech.

I'd like to begin, Mr. Speaker, again by recognizing your one-year anniversary just past, and congratulate you. It's not an easy task. But I want to commend you for your firmness but fairness, Mr. Speaker.

I want to also welcome the new member from Saskatoon Idylwyld here into the Assembly. It's got to be a proud and an honourable day for any member that has the privilege of being allowed to serve in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — I want to also . . . I want to let the member from member from Battleford-Cut Knife know that our prayers were in fact with him when he went through some trial. And I'm so very pleased to see that he's back here with us in this Legislative Assembly. Welcome back.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, for the past few years I have risen in this House during the reply to the Throne Speech to discuss challenges — challenges to our province, to our constituencies, challenges in our personal lives. And this year, Mr. Speaker, it's no different.

Last year at this time I had just resigned as Speaker and taken on the challenge of becoming a Liberal minister in a coalition government. It was a challenge I felt I needed to take on for my constituents and for the people of Saskatchewan. I said last year that it was a challenge of how to best serve the people who put their trust in you and represent their interests.

This past year is no different . . . was no different to me, Mr. Speaker. I made a choice to remain in the coalition government a mere five months ago for my electors and for those I had made a commitment to in my ministry.

So, Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a feeling of great anticipation and some trepidation. These are my first remarks as an independent member. I am happy to be at this point, but I did not arrive here easily. It has been a long journey and indeed took a great amount of soul-searching.

(16:00)

The decision has been one of the most difficult in my life. The choices are made on a diverseness of factors. As elected officials, we pursue this office with our own visions and interests but we must also recognize, Mr. Speaker, our number one goal is to represent the views of our constituents — the people who bestowed their trust in us and this specific honour.

And it's also those people that I had the privilege of introducing

earlier in the House — our families, my wife and my daughter, and those people around us that support us in whatever decisions that we decide to make. As a matter of fact, I can almost hear my little grandchildren now saying, go poppa, go.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — Mr. Speaker, I accepted, I accepted the challenge as Speaker and minister because I was convinced that stability is important to good government. I am even more convinced of that now. We are all here for the greater good than ourselves.

And we're not here for ourselves; this is not a game of personal political agendas. We are responsible for creating good public policy for this province and its people. Some of these folks forget the reasons that they were sent here was to represent the people that gave them the honour and the privilege to serve here; to work together, Mr. Speaker, to work together. It's so easy to sit and criticize, easiest thing in the world. But when there needs to be a plan put in place and some action, boy, that makes it a little tough.

Not everyone appreciates the decision I made, Mr. Speaker, and I understand their judgment. It has been difficult for them to accept my decision — as difficult as it was for me to make it. But it was important for me to make that choice, choice that honoured that decision I made last year and accepted the responsibilities of my commitment. Although I now sit as an independent member in the legislature, I will continue to use Liberal values and philosophies as I represent my constituents in proposed legislation that is important to all the people of this great province.

I have made my decisions for good reasons, and I want to deal with some of them here today and how they relate to my constituents, to this coalition government, and its Speech from the Throne. I also want to discuss the innovations in my constituency, and inform the members of this House of some of the initiatives that they have undertaken and some of the undertakings in the ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Speaker, challenge and commitment is what I believe the Throne Speech is all about. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak about my most important role in this legislator . . . in this legislature and that is representing the residents and the constituency of Melville.

My commitment to them has never wavered nor has the principle changed for me since I was elected in 1995. I tour and I visit my constituency when my ministerial commitments allow and I return daily phone calls and e-mails that come to my office. Those are important to me.

Having said that, I would like to welcome any of the constituents who might be watching these proceedings in their own home, either on channel 13 or through the Internet with video streaming at the Legislative Assembly Web site. It has been an exciting year for the constituency and there is more to come in this coming year, Mr. Speaker.

Why, you might ask? Because challenge and commitment — the residents of Melville constituency are up to any challenges.

And this year they have committed themselves to large-scale projects and community events like never before, Mr. Speaker.

My constituency, Mr. Speaker, is made up of many small towns and villages and the city of Melville. Some are under 100 people and some only number a few hundred, but they don't view themselves as individual communities; they view themselves as a community at large. They look for innovations that can help themselves and their neighbours. They don't see living in rural Saskatchewan as a disadvantage, like the opposition does. They view it as, rather, as an opportunity . . . an opportunity waiting to grow with a level of commitment from all of its citizens.

Two major projects have involved the whole constituency from Grayson to Neudorf, Killaly to Goodeve to Ituna to Balcarres, and to Melville and all the communities in between.

One started over a decade ago, Mr. Speaker, and will come to fruition in June of this year. That is the new St. Peter's Hospital. The city of Melville and the surrounding communities have fundraised, and they've worked and they've fundraised and they've worked for over a decade. With commitment like that, they deserve to be rewarded with a new hospital that will serve generations to come for the community at large, Mr. Speaker, not any single or individual community.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Osika: — The second major project started approximately 18 months ago. And then again, it engaged volunteers from all communities in the constituency and also First Nations neighbours to the south, Treaty Four. The ethanol steering committee is formed from some of the finest members of our community — and I won't name them because there are too many — and they have engaged interest from investors interested in our area for development.

I was pleased to hear the member from Regina South make an announcement on behalf of the coalition government on an ethanol strategy recently. I was even more pleased to hear the mayor of Melville making comments the same day on the strategy and the constituency's commitment to developing a plant in their area.

Mr. Speaker, there are also other investment opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. My constituents are willing to meet the challenge with commitment because they know the infrastructure is there for making rural Saskatchewan a viable place to do business.

Last year, over \$2 million was invested to upgrade the highways and roads in the constituency. Over \$6 million has been invested in the past four years. A CommunityNet announcement was made two weeks ago.

We have some of the best schools in the province. Davison School was just inducted into the League of Peaceful Schools.

Melville and Hubbard received Saskatchewan infrastructure program grants. Community initiatives funding went to Oasis Youth Centre, kidsville playground, and Qu'Appelle Valley Recreation Association — great recreational infrastructure that

has again attracted the Canada Cup baseball tournament to Melville.

Transit for the disabled funding for Balcarres and Ituna and six new housing units for Balcarres.

Just before I move on, Mr. Speaker, I want to again mention the expansion of businesses in the city of Melville, as I did in a member's statement here recently. The city of Melville has seen significant growth in the commercial sector over the past several months in the downtown area and on the outskirts of Melville.

Dale and Joanne Holowaty, I want to congratulate them on the opening of a new A&W franchise on Highway No. 10 — home of good food and an employer, most importantly, to 20 full- and part-time staff.

Downtown, Garth Kowalchuk, owner of Kowalchuk Meats, has expanded his retail operation. Anchor Water Conditioning, owned by a friend, Frank Melanson, has opened a new downtown store. Donna Gadica has increased her business presence by opening a second store, the Cornerstone Market.

I want to move on to the innovations in my ministry with these comments, Mr. Speaker. The constituency of Melville's 10,000 residents are a prototype of communities working together for success for other rural areas in this province to emulate, Mr. Speaker. I think — no, I don't think, I believe — our prestigious editor of the Melville *Advance*, Lin Orosz, has it right when in a previous column he said, and I'll quote, "Economic development isn't a science, it's an attitude."

It is challenge and commitment, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's been just over a year since I became minister in the coalition government and indeed it has been an interesting time. This past year has challenged me. It has been more complicated, technical, and multi-faceted than I ever anticipated. For every decision, there has been a range of policy changes and decisions to decipher.

But I am always reminded, Mr. Speaker, that despite tough times and challenges that we might face within our ministries and across this coalition government, it is an honour to serve in this coalition government — a coalition of ideas to govern this great province of ours. One could be worse off if it were part of an opposition bankrupt of ideas like the one across the floor.

In relation to my own ministry, Mr. Speaker, I want to discuss some of the challenges and innovations that have occurred in Municipal Affairs and Housing. I would also like to talk of those who have worked tirelessly to make this province a better place.

Mr. Speaker, I want at the outset to commend those people who have been a great resource to me, the public servants in all the three ministries I serve. I know that from our deputy ministers, our assistant deputy ministers, and their staffs, they have all worked very hard this past year to support the agenda of the people of this province. Having been a civil servant for 11 years, I have great respect for these people and I thank them for their efforts and look forward to continuing working with them.

I want to thank all my staff as well, to the staff at the constituency offices throughout the province, to Candace in Melville. I want to thank Kim and Jeff and Bonnie in my office, and Gloria, and all those people that make our days much easier. I'm also very appreciative of the relationship I have developed with the stakeholder groups such as the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association.

Mr. Speaker, the mission of our department is strengthening communities by building capacity. My goal and focus this year has been on building better dialogue and building relationships with municipal officials. As elected officials and administrators, they play an essential role in determining our communities' futures. It is most important to create a strong local government system that will represent our communities today and for the years to come. I truly value the opportunities I have had to tour this province last year and meet and engage each of those people in an exchange of ideas.

It pleases me to see that SARM representative for zone 6, Mr. Bob Schultz, tell the Lloydminster *Booster* after a recent meeting that, and I quote, Mr. Speaker:

We have a very good situation with Mr. Osika, where he can sit down with us and we can talk face to face over problems that we have amongst our association and his department.

That is pleasing and very meaningful. And that's the meaning of co-operation and working relationships. I want to do even more of that this year, Mr. Speaker, and I want to develop even a stronger relationship.

In terms of revenue sharing I appreciate — I truly do — that municipalities and communities are faced with having to make some tough choices about services and how they will meet their residents' needs. I respect very much their deliberations and their considerations of those challenges that those elected people have accepted and will meet head on its challenge and commitment.

I have brought the concerns of local government officials to the government members' attention and we all recognize the need for more revenue sharing. However, that will have to be taken in context of the province's fiscal position, Mr. Speaker, and the Finance minister will make it clear in a couple of days just exactly what that situation will be for all of us.

I also want to update the members of the House on the status of the legislative amendments to The Rural Municipality Act and the introduction of the cities Act. The proposed amendment for The Rural Municipality Act this year continue on the commitment to increase municipal autonomy and authority by reducing the involvement of the province in matters that are completely municipal in nature.

The cities Act, which was received in mid-February and which I commend the cities for, is a proactive approach that they have taken in advancing our relationship with this significant initiative. The cities' proposal includes a number of significant policy changes. And once the staff for Municipal Affairs and Justice have reviewed it, it can be submitted through the

legislative review process. If these tasks and approvals can be completed in time, I would be in favour of introducing a draft Bill into the legislature this session. I have made that commitment.

The Saskatchewan property assessment system is very important to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker. And this province is committed to building a better system for property owners by making necessary changes that address the current concerns and issues. We all want an assessment system that is relevant and responsive to the realities of agricultural property owners and property owners in our communities. While we may need to examine new approaches in the future, I also appreciate that increased funding to SAMA (Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency) is important to help them achieve their goals. And I reinforce this with my colleagues.

The two initiatives that we've taken up with the Assessment Management Agency have been on the agricultural side. An amendment has been made to provide grain storage facilities under producer control the same exemption as on-farm grain storage facilities and grain condominiums. In my constituency, this affects terminal T22.

Our ministry has also made inroads in terms of legislation necessary for the income approach. Premier Calvert has announced that this legislation will be introduced this session. The income approach is seen to provide better representation of the values of commercial revenue-generating property since it in fact reflects the way in which the private sector values properties for sale.

(16:15)

Another important program for the ministry and people of Saskatchewan has been the . . . on the infrastructure side, Mr. Speaker. In 2001-2002 more than 527 project applications were received under that program; however only 82 were able to be approved. However, having said that, over \$54 million in projects were in fact undertaken by the three levels of government involved in that particular program. Of that, almost \$30 million were for water and waste water projects.

For 2002-2003 more than 400 project applications were received and 156 recommended for approval; once again, with considerable investment in this great province of ours.

As the minister also responsible for Sask Water I'd like to talk a bit about the importance of quality of water in Saskatchewan. Over the past two years all Canadian . . . all governments — Canadian, the federal government, the provincial, municipal — have been reminded about the importance and the value of our water. It is also showed that we need solutions that are sustainable and affordable over the long term to address that kind of an issue. Costs to consumers must reflect not only current infrastructure and operating costs, but also the eventual cost of infrastructure upgrade or replacement.

These are once again challenges that we face, Mr. Speaker. We are not interested in creating a one-size-fit-all solution to drinking water quality issues. Instead, made-in-Saskatchewan solutions need to be tailor-made for the individual community — whether it's rural or urban.

Previously, Mr. Speaker, 43 communities in all have worked with Sask Water — and in some case with their neighbours — to find solutions that meet their needs. And they've come up with some significant solutions to address their local issues.

More than 50 communities currently are working with Sask Water to create custom-made, appropriate, and affordable solutions. And several more communities, Mr. Speaker, are exploring the possibility of working with the available people at the Saskatchewan Water Corporation.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, the communities can find appropriate solutions to their particular circumstances — and we will be there to assist them.

I also want to say that on this water issue that I enjoy meeting with the city of North Battleford this month — the second such meeting this year, the first being with my officials as I was unable to attend. I appreciated their March 14 letter thanking myself, and our ministry, and I want to quote:

... a very positive meeting and providing them with options.

I am a little disappointed with the member from North Battleford who has not fulfilled his commitment to them because I'm not sure that he was even aware what was happening when this situation became created about a ... over a year ago. But over promising and underperforming is a typical of that member.

A further area, Mr. Speaker, where we make strides is in Sask911. In January the service was expanded to another 168 municipalities and in total 477 municipalities, representing approximately 80 per cent of the land ... land line telephones now have the enhanced 911 service — important to respond to emergencies that people may be faced with.

Completion of this province-wide service, Mr. Speaker, is expanded to end ... by the end of this year or the beginning of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, I want to leave you with one last initiative through our ministry, which is the new municipal tool kit available on the municipal Web site. Although the member from Kindersley, and his colleagues across the floor, would like to bar technology from this province, we are moving ahead, Mr. Speaker, with innovative tools for local governments to assist them in their autonomy and their authority in developing their communities.

Technology is a part of our everyday life and our department wants to explore how that technology can be used to help municipalities build capacity and meet all their goals.

The tool kit offers information on partnerships and service agreements, on community advisory service, and much, much more. Other areas in the tool kit help with self-assessment and strategic planning processes to address key communication issues.

The ministry of Municipal Affairs is working towards developing more effective tools, legislation, and resources that will help our municipalities manage local matters.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, while the Saskatchewan Party would like this province not to expand and meet challenges head on with innovative solutions, they would encourage us to pack up and move west. The coalition government, my colleagues and I, will face the challenges that face this great province directly, and we will do the work that is needed to expand this province.

That is what this is all about. That's what the province is all about. That's what the people in this province are all about — challenge and commitment. I am proud to take on the challenge of creating a better province, Mr. Speaker. I, Mr. Speaker, certainly cannot support the amendment, but I certainly will support the Speech from the Throne.

And I hear the member from North Battleford. I feel really sorry for him, Mr. Speaker. But again, perhaps his day might come. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to join in this debate over the Speech from the Throne and, of course, it's a pleasure to be back on the floor of the legislature representing the people of Battleford-Cut Knife.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I have never thought that I ... that the day would come when I would look across the floor and actually be glad to see them — members opposite — sitting there. Yes it's true, I wish there were a few less of them and that they were sitting over here but nevertheless after some of the experiences I've been through in the last year, believe it or not, I am happy to see those members, along with my colleagues, my friends, the Saskatchewan Party caucus.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — To all members who may know or may not know I was diagnosed with acute leukemia on June 22, 2001. Since my diagnosis, I learned that this was one of the most serious forms of a very serious illness. And let me assure all members, it's an experience you would rather avoid if you can. It's been said by many others that through the battle with cancer you don't always think you can feel any sicker and then the treatments actually begin. I began treatments for the illness and after two blasts of chemotherapy, I was discharged from the hospital on October 6.

And I have to say that I was probably the only one that didn't give up on myself. Well maybe Shirley didn't either, but that's all. But I knew that my God and I would get through this and so ...

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — But I don't want to dwell on myself, but I do want to take this opportunity, my first chance to speak to this Assembly since my treatment, and say a few words of thanks.

I want to thank everyone who worked in the hospital. These people are nearly run off their feet and yet they can treat patients very well. To the doctors and nurses who saw to my needs, thank you very much.

To all my colleagues on both sides of the legislature, I want to thank you all for the kind words and prayers many of you offered. It really did lift . . . help lift Shirley and my spirits during the most difficult days of treatments. Thank you to my entire family, who continued to cheer me on as I recover . . . my recovery continues. And I have to tell you that I did some blood work this morning in Spiritwood and my hemoglobin went from 91 to 105. So that's . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Peters: — I would like to especially thank my constituent assistants in Unity and Battleford who saw their workloads increase significantly after I got sick. Their dedication showed itself through and they were to be, and they were to be and continue to be the real help as I continue to slowly regain my strength and energy. And of course, to my constituents, who have been so patient, so kind since my illness began. I thank them for their understanding and thank them for their good wishes.

Now I am convinced more than ever that you will not find a better bunch of people in the world than the Battleford-Cut Knife people. It's my honour to represent them in this great place, and I pledge to the people of the constituency that I will be far more visible this year than it was possible for me last year. After the conclusion of this session of the Legislature in the summer, I want to get to as many events and functions in the Battleford-Cut Knife as I can. I would ask my constituents to keep me informed of the many events that they have.

Mr. Speaker, fighting cancer is not pleasant, and when you're in the middle of treatment, sometimes you don't know where you will find the strength to carry on. But no matter what, you have to endure — it is worth it.

Mr. Speaker, now more than ever, I believe in this greatest province in Canada with the greatest people. To go through something like I have gone through — and continue to go through — it makes you appreciate every day you have in a great province like Saskatchewan. This is the greatest province with the greatest people. I've always known that, but of course now I know even better.

I'm here to bring, I'm here to bring change that makes our province even better and stronger. I'm here to bring change to our economy that will stem the tide of out-migration and spur job creation. Unlike what some of the members opposite would have us believe, it's not Saskatchewan's place to trail every other province economically. Mr. Speaker, this province has so many natural advantages, we should be leading the way economically.

We have natural resources, we have people, and we have talent. However, what we don't have is a vision and leadership of people elected to guide us in this province. They continue to make potential investors and employers feel unwelcome in Saskatchewan.

And for the sake of the children and grandchildren everyone in this Assembly wants to see us have an opportunity to grow up and lead their lives in this province, I ask the members opposite, once and for all, to recognize the harm they are doing.

And if they can't do that, call an election and let the people decide.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. members opposite confuse the criticism for NDP as criticism for the province. This is totally wrong. We criticize the mistakes of the government for one reason and one reason alone. The greatest province in Canada deserves better leadership, stronger leadership.

Mr. Speaker, every government has to . . . has an expiry date, a date in which they stop looking out for the best interest of the province and begin to look after their own self-interests. This is what's happened to the NDP. Good intentions have given away to political survival.

The greatest people in the greatest province deserve better, Mr. Speaker, and I am totally convinced that they will get better when those members call the next election.

The greatest people in the greatest province deserve leadership driven by vision and hope, not by bare political survival.

I see nothing in this Throne Speech to indicate that the members opposite have any intention of changing direction despite zero job creation, a falling population, and nearly \$500 million of deficit.

I see nothing in this Throne Speech to indicate that they are prepared to take up once again the Saskatchewan tradition in . . . tradition role in leadership in agriculture.

I see nothing from them in terms of innovative solutions to problems for growing waiting lists in our health care system.

For 10 years they have played the blame game. Every problem in the world was the result of someone else. Now they've taken to defending themselves by attacking premiers in other provinces.

Isn't it ironic, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite now regularly defend their actions by regularly attacking a Liberal government in BC (British Columbia) when they themselves are clinging to power through the so-called co-operation of Liberals right here in Saskatchewan. I wonder what the member from Melville or from Saskatoon Northwest have to say when the NDP regularly attack their fellow Liberals.

(16:30)

Mr. Speaker, many issues will come up throughout this session. In my constituency agriculture remains a priority, highways continue to be a major concern, health care and access to it remains top in the list of many people. And of course, getting this economy moving again is on the top of people's minds. Everything else is tied to the health of the economy.

Whether the government has adequate funding for health care or education or highways is tied directly to the health of the economy. A growing tax base means more revenue for governments to pay for important services and programs. A shrinking tax base means less money available. It's simple. We have to get this economy going if we are to preserve our health care system, our schools, and our infrastructure.

I see nothing in this Throne Speech that would indicate to me that the members opposite have any idea of how to do this. Therefore, I cannot vote in favour of the Throne Speech. Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very pleased to respond to the Throne Speech of our government. I want to begin my remarks by saying, once again, in this Assembly that I've also been very honoured to have represented the people of Saskatoon Eastview over the last, almost four years.

Saskatoon Eastview is a very special constituency. It has a great mix of seniors, young families, schools, and businesses. My colleagues will have to bear with me when I repeat again the fact that Eastview has the most seniors per capita of any constituency in Canada. It has the very busy Market Mall that I am sure many people are familiar with. It has several high schools and quite a few elementary schools. It has seniors condos, small offices and businesses, seniors complexes, and several special facilities such as the Calder Centre, which is an alcohol and drug treatment centre, and Cheshire Homes, which is a home for the young disabled that fosters independence.

I often have the occasion to meet and visit with many of these special people who have helped pioneer our province.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my family for their continuing support. My husband tolerates my long absences from home and the demands of political life, which he has done for many years as I was based in Regina in my previous work, and my children are used to leaving messages on my phone. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm connected to e-mail so can be reached from anywhere in the world that my children travel.

I want to offer a special thank you to my constituency assistant, April Anderson, in Saskatoon, who supports me in everything I do.

I want to also thank my staff here in Regina, who also are very supportive: Sharon Lyons, Michelle Oussoren, Dolores St. Julien, and Gail McNab.

In the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker, the government gave a broad outline of what we were going to do in the future. That's what throne speeches are for — a broad outline.

Mr. Speaker, the budget will give more concrete details of that plan and the budget will be followed by legislation introduced in this Assembly in this session. So it goes — Throne Speech, budget, legislative change.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight several things in the Throne Speech. I will talk about some of the good things that are going on in the economy and the environment, infrastructure, about the importance of education, and about some issues around health care, which I can't resist.

Mr. Speaker, our government's plan is a reasonable plan to deal with changing times. Who would have thought that in March 2002 we would be in this Assembly . . . in this Assembly we

would have seen what we saw on September 11? How could we have known any of this six months ago? We couldn't, of course. No one ever imagined in their wildest dreams what we saw that day.

Anyone who pretends that the events of September 11 didn't have an effect on Saskatchewan is ignoring the facts and perhaps displaying an insular view of the world. The Conference Board of Canada, Mr. Speaker, mentions the terrorist attack a number of times as a huge factor in the situation we find ourselves in. But we're bouncing back.

In the United States growth is expected to be well beyond predictions. The members across the way are stuck in old predictions and doom and gloom. In Canada we're expecting 4 per cent growth as opposed to 2 per cent. The *National Post* says that manufacturing shipments are up. People are buying. We know this because inventories are down.

Mr. Speaker, nurses are good at keeping track of patients, of their heart rates, of their vital statistics, but GDP (gross domestic product) and manufacturing shipments are not on a monitor screen.

In this job I do read the business pages and more; I note what the business pages are saying. Century 21 says the hottest housing market in Canadian history is about to have the heat turned up even higher by spring sales that are predicted to add another 4 per cent to the already new record high national average house price. This is good news for Canada. However, it's how we recover in Saskatchewan from external events that is most important and that is where our government excels.

We're taking a measured response rather than going around the province spreading doom and gloom, holding meetings closed to the public and attended by a handful of people. As it said in the Throne Speech, we will maintain our commitment to meet Saskatchewan's immediate priorities and to expand our economy.

And to do that, Mr. Speaker, we won't make unsustainable tax reductions, we won't return to massive deficits, we won't sell Crown assets that provide services at competitive rates. We will ask for the co-operation of the public of Saskatchewan. We will remain focused and we will remain dynamic. We will restructure government to do this. We will enhance public services, improve performance, and apply new technologies and achieve savings.

In contrast to the bus tour of the members opposite where the bus figuratively hit the ditch, our listening tour was a big success. It highlighted to us that Saskatchewan people are developing their communities, people are opening new businesses, people are building, and people have optimism for the future.

We saw scientists who relocated to Saskatchewan and have contracts with NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). We saw home businesses. We saw feedlots. Whether it was small businesses, such as bed and breakfasts or larger cattle feeding ventures, people have an eye on the future.

Many sectors of the economy in Saskatchewan are moving

forward. The plan for our government is to ensure that more sectors move. This land of Saskatchewan is where opportunity lies.

The economy right now is booming Mr. Speaker, especially in my husband's area of small business — the housing industry. In Saskatoon, construction is phenomenal. Everywhere you look, there are buildings going up.

In *The StarPhoenix*, Garth Turner, who is no special friend of our government, when referring to the housing market, even with increased mortgage rates, says in last Tuesday's edition of *The StarPhoenix* that, quote: "... the economy is getting stronger at warp speed." He doesn't expect higher interests to slow growth too much.

I've been told that in Regina last year over 50 R-2000 homes were sold. So people are also buying with an eye to the conservation of energy.

If people aren't optimistic, then how is it that they are confident enough to continue to buy homes? If builders aren't optimistic, then how is it that they continue to buy lots and build homes for sale?

Mr. Speaker, are the opposition's members smarter than these business people who look around them and make decisions based on their experience in the market? Being negative suits their political purpose, which is trying to make people believe that they have the only answers, which are usually only for tax cuts.

But on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, homebuyers have to be confident they can afford to buy a house. And bankers — well known to be the most conservative types — have to be confident that homebuyers can make their mortgage payments. Lenders don't like to be homeowners, having to sell a house rather than making considerable profits on a mortgage that gets repaid over a number of years.

Mr. Speaker, there is something amiss in Saskatchewan today. The members across the way and their small group of supporters are denying everything good that is happening in our province. According to StatsCanada, we have averaged 2,400 housing starts per year over the last several years. That's kept some construction companies busy year-round for several years.

New housing starts have been worth \$146 million to this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, people are showing optimism and buying houses. People are buying bigger houses, and people who have never bought houses before are buying houses. That shows people are optimistic. Small business have indicated they'll be hiring — that is also optimism. Everywhere people are diversifying and being innovative as we saw demonstrated on our bus tour. We know Saskatchewan is a land of opportunity as well as innovation.

Generally speaking, Mr. Speaker, consumers are buying. I saw a headline last week that said, "Consumers have caught analysts off guard" from the *National Post*. And this morning I was reading in the *Financial Post* that zero per cent financing has

had a real effect on maintaining the economy. The quote is:

... (Give the) consumer what is like a drug to them — (which is) free debt — and they just ... (go) out and ... (do) their Energizer bunny thing.

Mr. Speaker, the economy has remained strong and we are benefiting from that in Saskatchewan.

I looked at the Regina Chamber of Commerce report called *ChamberLink* which arrived in my office recently. Here's what the survey results printed in that magazine indicate: 64 per cent anticipate business revenues to increase 10 per cent or more — 10 per cent or more, Mr. Speaker. Two-thirds of the members are very optimistic, unlike the members opposite.

John Hopkins, the president of the Regina Chamber of Commerce, says that economic development must be the number one priority of all levels of government. And it is one of our top priorities, and it is why we have an investment attraction council in government — to explore opportunities for improving Saskatchewan's economy and diversification opportunities.

To help build the economy, we have a vision for making Saskatchewan a land of opportunity. But we are doing it by harnessing the ideas and innovative spirit of the people of Saskatchewan — not by making ideological and perhaps rash choices. We have met with Saskatchewan businesses and residents over the last year and have listened to their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, Winston Churchill said, quote, "Ponder, then act." We have listened to Saskatchewan residents and now we are acting.

So where will change happen? Well the Action Committee on the Rural Economy, or the ACRE committee, has made recommendations for diversifying the rural economy. We will respond to those recommendations.

My colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, has proposed a new farm safety net to the ... program to the federal government. Will he get it by going to Ottawa and just demanding something of the federal government? No, he'll get it because he understands how government works and how to work co-operatively, because he's an experienced politician. He understands the federal direction and how to work between levels of government, and he is meeting with the federal minister this week and will once again impress the message on him that Saskatchewan farmers need the federal government's assistance in the international markets and to help fight the effects of the drought.

We need the support of colleagues on both sides to reinforce the minister's message to the federal government. The member from Kindersley needs to be onside. As my colleague from Yorkton said several days ago, it makes it very difficult to get money from the federal government when that member who is a farmer says farmers don't need money. I thought the member from Kindersley understood the farm situation.

What is he saying? They haven't heard his plan. Saskatchewan residents must hold the opposition accountable for their ideas

which so far we haven't heard, other than better weather.

I was pleased to visit Pound-Maker industries in Lanigan on our very successful bus tour last summer. My mother grew up on a farm, Mr. Speaker. Like many of my colleagues, I am one generation off the farm. My grandparents farmed north of North Battleford and I greatly enjoyed and have fond memories of my stays there as a child. They had a mixed farm with grain, cattle, pigs, and chicken.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that the member from Cannington's constituency has a feedlot planned for Carnduff. Apparently, so far 184 interested people have bought shares and they plan to have 10,000 cattle to start. Someday they plan to have 20,000 cattle, Mr. Speaker. Land of opportunity and optimism.

I'm told that why Alberta has a more valuable agriculture economy than we do is that they got into livestock on a greater scale than we have, as has Manitoba. We are into grain. Others around the world have been interfering in the grain markets by subsidizing their producers and now we need to move to more livestock to use some of our natural advantages, one of which is having so much land.

It seems Saskatchewan people are ready to move in that direction in a big way. People in Saskatchewan are getting back into livestock because of the decrease in grain prices on the world market and for the chance to use feed grown in Saskatchewan. It seems to make sense to me, Mr. Speaker, the idea of using your resources in the most strategic way. But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, this new direction will provide jobs for people in the area.

The article says the norm in the industry is one job per 1,000 head of cattle; so 10 jobs right away, with the chance of moving to 20 jobs. It also says that there are spinoff jobs that will occur because of this expansion, such as trucking cattle, hauling feed, and veterinary services.

This is a strategy we need: private sector investment in rural Saskatchewan, and community members working together to keep our younger people in Saskatchewan and to ensure the survival of rural Saskatchewan.

And I also see in the March 14, 2002, *Waterfront Press* that more expansion into livestock of a different sort is occurring in my colleague from Regina Qu'Appelle Valley's constituency, where Warren and Cheryl Dodds have moved into sheep, goats, eggs, chicken, and cattle. They're interested in going into grass-raised meat because they feel that there's a market for this type of organic beef.

Mr. Speaker, many people are interested in organic food here at home and around the world. The Dodds have moved to pasture land because they feel it is more sustainable than cropland. They have free-range chickens already and want to expand their operation more as they see the market grow. Sustainable agriculture is an important direction for Saskatchewan farmers.

(16:45)

The economy is diversifying. In Carnduff we see more jobs from expansion into cattle, and in Lumsden farmers are

switching their production to a specialty market that continues to develop as does the organic market.

Truly, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people are optimistic and innovative. And I was interested in hearing from my colleague, the member from Moosomin, who on Monday talked about selling the by-products of hog operations back to housewives or to greenhouses as fertilizer. I do wonder what housewives in particular would use it for. In any case, there are obviously endless opportunities for diversification in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, last week, my colleague . . . the colleagues, the . . . of Energy and Mines, the Minister of Agriculture, announced our greenprint for ethanol strategy as part of a larger energy development and conservation strategy. It has been well received, even by the opposition.

Ethanol can be produced even by using some of the by-products of the feedlot I talked about previously, and from established places such as Pound-Maker, who already produce ethanol. As my colleague, the Deputy Premier, has said, this is one of our responses to the ACRE Committee and one of the ways we are going to continue to diversify the economy.

And this greenprint for ethanol will help in reducing the amount of carbon monoxide our cars emit by as much as 20 per cent, and will cut down smog creating components by 15 per cent. We are addressing climate change issues. We will continue to work with communities to ensure the drinking water supply is safe for Saskatchewan residents.

Because we are in a technological age, we have the need to . . . we have need for the necessary legislation to ensure that people who do business on the Internet are protected. We will do that with the introduction of new legislation this session.

We are soon going to be benefiting from the synchrotron in Saskatoon at the University of Saskatchewan. The synchrotron will enable very advanced research to take place in Saskatoon. People are already getting into position to take advantage of this. I see from today's *StarPhoenix* that the synchrotron institute is almost ready to open. The institute will provide training for researchers at other synchrotrons, such as in Berkeley and at Stanford, on how to use a synchrotron.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture research and medical research will be the primary recipients of increased research. But Saskatoon is not the only beneficiary of more research activity. We are also conducting research in Regina at the Petroleum Technology Research Centre. The Saskatchewan Research Council continues to provide leadership in this area. Doing this kind of research will help to recruit and retain important professionals in the province.

Mr. Speaker, our policies are pragmatic and not ideological. Tax cuts are not the answer to every question. The new wealth in circulation from tax cuts can only go so far. I'd like to quote Tommy Douglas here:

Expecting tax cuts to transform the economy (Tommy Douglas would say) is like saying you are feeding the sparrows by giving the horses oats.

Unrestrained cutting of taxes leads to the massive deficits we see in Ontario and British Columbia. Even mighty Alberta has a surplus this year because of tax increases. I repeat: most of their surplus is based on tax increases.

In fact, here's an interesting clipping from Wednesday's March 20 *Leader-Post* titled "Taxman jams hand into most pockets," talking about Alberta and the new taxes. Albertans will pay more for liquor, cigarettes, health care, education, and other services, but corporations and small businesses will enjoy an \$81 million tax cut. Health care premiums will increase by 30 per cent. The government will be lifting a freeze on school property tax and increasing car insurance by 20 per cent and increasing court filing costs and traffic fines. And on it goes.

Mr. Speaker, we know from history and economics that high-income earners always benefit from more tax cuts. Trickle-down has been disproven time and time again.

For me and I know for many of my colleagues, it has been very important to take low-income earners off the tax rolls. If low-income earners have more disposable income, they spend it on the basics required to live. They are more independent and rely less on government services, and that is important to them, to the economy, and to society.

We are spending more on important infrastructure to help businesses and people in all of Saskatchewan. So, Mr. Speaker, we have our eye firmly on the ball when it comes to economic development and infrastructure.

Before I leave that important area of discussion, I want to talk for a minute about the Crowns. Mr. Speaker, the opposition says they want to reduce the Crowns to core. What does that mean? It could mean a huge loss of jobs in rural Saskatchewan, not just in urban Saskatchewan. And my colleague from Moose Jaw Wakamow has already touched on some of these statistics.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to do it again. SaskPower has almost twice as many employees in rural Saskatchewan as they have in Regina. What would moving to core services mean to these employees in those communities?

Further, Mr. Speaker, SaskPower provides services to the people of Saskatchewan and the cost of those services are among the lowest in Canada. SaskPower contributes more than \$675 million to the provincial economy. It provides services to 432,000 customers and the profits from SaskPower — who, I need to re-emphasize, provide service to residents of the province at a competitive rate — they come back to Saskatchewan in the form of dividends to the province and profits from investment.

Here's a question for all of us to ponder. When would rural electrification have taken place if not for SaskPower? Would my grandparents have gotten electricity on the farm? Without SaskPower would private companies come to Saskatchewan to provide the infrastructure for that expensive service? What would customers have been charged had they done so? I'll leave people to draw their own conclusions, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about SaskTel. SaskTel has over 3,600 employees with 14 . . . 1,423 in rural areas. It has been listed twice as one

of the top 100 companies to work for. SaskTel has been investing 100 million per year in network improvement and maintenance. It provides high-speed Internet service to 61 per cent of the province, or 191 communities. It is providing new-millennium, cutting edge technology to the people of Saskatchewan.

My colleague, the minister responsible for Culture, Youth and Recreation who is also responsible for the Information Highway, emphasized in her closing remarks how people in this province are part of the community and give of themselves. Here's an example: SaskTel employees have given \$1.9 million to organizations across the province. They have donated over 70,000 hours to charities across the province. What would be the loss of that . . . What would the loss of that Crown mean to many organizations across the province?

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to briefly highlight one of the partnerships SaskTel is involved in and it reflects some of the many ways our government shows our commitment to women. If you open any DirectWest telephone book in Saskatchewan, you will find a Hot Peach abuse help lines page. Inspired by a very committed woman by the name of Virginia Fisher, this page provides information on abuse and the supports that are offered in the community.

I'm very pleased that SaskTel has partnered with the Provincial Association of Transition Houses to provide this valuable information across our province. And, Mr. Speaker, other provinces have recognized the value of this idea and are introducing their own abuse help line pages in their telephone books — another example of Saskatchewan leading the way.

SaskTel provides some of the least expensive services in Canada to our residents across the province. In Alberta, TELUS charges rural customers \$3.50 a month more than its urban customers. Do the members across the way know about that, Mr. Speaker? Or do they already know that private companies would charge rural folks more? In Saskatchewan, rural and urban rates are the same.

SaskTel will soon provide cellular service to more than 90 per cent of the population after an investment of over \$54 million in the next three years. What would a cut to only core services at SaskTel mean? Which services would be discontinued? Would rates change to reflect real costs, instead of always smoothing out charges to customers as SaskTel does? At TELUS, the higher cost to service the rural areas is reflected in the charges to rural customers.

Let's talk about SaskEnergy. SaskEnergy has 984 employees, with two-thirds of the employees located across the rural areas of the province. SaskEnergy provides services to more than 321,000 customers. SaskEnergy procures most of its supplies in Saskatchewan and since 1992 has invested \$616 million in projects such as extending service to rural and remote areas, and in updating infrastructure.

Services to rural areas are costly to provide. Would a private company extend services that are costly to rural areas where there are few customers? If they did, what would they charge?

The last Crown I'll talk about today is SGI (Saskatchewan

Government Insurance). SGI has 1,500 employees, with 500 in communities around the province. Last year SGI purchased goods for almost 800 vendors in the province . . . from almost 800 vendors in the province spending almost \$250 million in the province for commissions and fees, repairs, and goods and services. That does not include almost \$69 million in employee salaries.

SGI provides the second-lowest insurance rate in the country. If you compare the rates for a 2001 Ford Taurus across the country, insurance rates in Alberta are more than double ours.

SGI is well known for its community work. It supports the charity curling classic, the Safety Squad, the charity road race to benefit Chili for Children, and programs for youth at risk. In 2001 the corporation gave over half a million dollars to projects and groups in Saskatchewan.

Who among us wants to pay double for our auto insurance like they do in Alberta and Ontario, the provinces that my members across the way seek to emulate almost in all cases? The Saskatchewan Crowns help us to keep the cost of insuring automobiles down; offer insurance and other services to the people of Saskatchewan. The Crowns were formed to help the people of Saskatchewan to provide people with services that no private company would undertake without massive government investment.

But the members opposite do hate the success of our Crowns. Mr. Speaker, the Crowns I've talked about do provide services and infrastructure around the province that private enterprise would never provide. And now the opposition wants to get rid of them and sell that infrastructure to the lowest bidders.

Let's talk about Alberta again for a minute. Now several of my colleagues have mentioned the Alberta budget and its effect on the average Albertan. I'm sure the opposition is not happy that their recent role models in BC and Alberta have shown us what they're all about — especially Alberta, where it always seems that nothing could go wrong. That province, always used as a shining example of perfection, is going to raise health premiums.

In Saskatchewan in 2001 a family earning \$50,000 paid \$794 in sales tax, but now in Alberta they'll pay more than that in health premiums. Let me talk briefly about health premiums in the system in Alberta . . . (inaudible) . . . Do you want me to repeat that?

In Saskatchewan a family earning \$50,000 pays \$794 in sales tax. In Alberta they'll pay more than that in health premiums. I'll get to the actual cost of health premiums in a minute.

Let me briefly talk about health premiums in the system in Alberta. The premiums are a payroll tax that, in most cases, must be administered by businesses. It can be difficult and expensive to administer. For example, working couples in Alberta have to decide which one of them will pay for the premium and have it deducted from their pay.

Mr. Speaker, I am told that last year the Alberta government had to write off millions of dollars of uncollectable accounts. I was told over \$30 million — people who couldn't or didn't pay

their premiums. And I'm also told, Mr. Speaker, that it cost more to administer the premium program, which cost about 15 million to administer, than it cost to administer . . .

An Hon. Member: — How much?

Hon. Ms. Junor: — Fifteen million to administer the program. And it cost \$10 million to administer the payroll of health practitioners in the province. It cost more than that.

With our tax cuts, our low housing costs, our reasonable electricity and auto insurance, and no health premiums, Saskatchewan cities remain cheaper than Vancouver, than Calgary, than Winnipeg, than Toronto, than Montreal, than Charlottetown, than Halifax. All of these advantages don't seem to be of interest to the members opposite; they never talk about it.

Mr. Speaker, I've already mentioned health premiums in Alberta. They will be increasing by \$44 a month for a single person or \$528 a year. For a family, it will now cost \$88 a month for a total of 1,056. Compare that to our 700-and-some-dollar sales tax. The increase is 30 per cent. And despite a 1996 promise to the contrary, 90,000 seniors will have to pay the increased payments.

Approximately 153,000 seniors will be eligible for subsidies. British Columbia is the only other province to charge premiums and it has increased problems as . . . premiums as well; problems too . . . (inaudible) . . . I do? Now?

An average BC family will now be paying \$1,296 per year in health premium and that . . . and housing costs . . . houses that cost a quarter of a million dollars, Mr. Speaker. *The Edmonton Journal* reported that inflation in the price of energy last year in that city was 133 per cent. That's pretty scary, Mr. Speaker.

As a former unionized worker, I worry about the members opposite and their attitude towards people who are working that are unionized. And I want to remind all members that the benefits that union members have fought hard for have benefited other workers generally in society. Things like labour standards, which the members opposite may not like; things like occupational health and safety standards, which may be viewed as impediments or unnecessary regulations according to them . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members, it is now past the hour of 5 o'clock. This House stands recessed until 7 p.m. this evening.

The Assembly recessed until 19:00.