

The Assembly met at 10:00.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present more petitions from citizens of Hudson Bay and area. This is in addition to the many petitions and the hundreds of names that I have submitted to date, Mr. Speaker. These are individuals who are concerned about the shortage of long-term care beds in Hudson Bay. 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 changes that would allow for an expansion of at least five long-term care beds in the community of Hudson Bay to meet the needs of the citizens of Hudson Bay and the surrounding area.

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

Signatures on this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from Hudson Bay, Prairie River, Preeceville, Mistatim, Weekes, and Erwood.

I so present, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the dangerous and deplorable condition of Highway 58. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take immediate action and make necessary repairs to Highway 58 in order to avoid serious injury and property damage.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals all from the community of Shamrock.

I so present.

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on the Kyoto accord. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary actions to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

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

And the prayer is signed by residents of Swift Current.

I so present.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again on behalf of residents of all of the southwest corner of the province who are concerned with the state of the hospital in

Swift Current. The prayer of their petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to commit its share of funding for a new regional hospital in Swift Current.

And, Mr. Speaker, the petitioners today are from the city of Swift Current and the communities of Shaunavon, Stewart Valley, and Maple Creek.

I so present.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise with a petition from citizens in my constituency that are concerned about the rising costs of drugs. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately reinstate a reasonable annual deductible amount for prescription drugs in Saskatchewan.

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

And, Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the good folks of Kincaid, Meyronne, Gravelbourg, and Hazenmore.

I so present.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here with citizens opposed to possible reductions in services to Davidson and Craik health centres:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Davidson and Craik health centres be maintained at its current level of service at a minimum of 24-hour acute care, emergency, and doctor services available, as well as lab services, public health, home care, and long-term care services available to users from the Craik and Davidson area and beyond.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Signed by the good citizens from Girvin, Davidson, Smiley, Rosetown, Bladworth, and Imperial.

I so present.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to receive petitions from citizens concerned about the Kyoto accord and the implications on the Saskatchewan economy. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the provincial government to take the necessary action to protect our province's economy by working to halt the federal government's intent to sign on to the Kyoto accord in its current form.

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

Signed by the citizens of Biggar, Cando, Landis, and Perdue.

I so present.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have petitions to present on behalf of constituents. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to ensure the best possible health care coverage for the communities of Govan, Duval, Strasbourg, and Bulyea by placing those communities in the Regina Regional Health Authority as opposed to the Saskatoon Regional Health Authority.

Signatures to this petition, Mr. Speaker, come from the communities of Bulyea and Strasbourg.

I so present.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Deputy Clerk: — According to order the following petitions have been reviewed and are hereby read and received as addendums to previously tabled petitions being sessional papers nos. 22, 129, 165, 169, 174, 437, 438, and 442.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to welcome to your gallery today two individuals who work closely with me on a daily basis, that being Mr. Rob Cunningham and Mr. Benn Greer. And I would invite all members to give them a very warm welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Shortage of Long-term Care Beds in Hudson Bay

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this week I have been presenting petitions from Hudson Bay and district residents concerned with the insufficient number of long-term care beds in Hudson Bay.

Currently Hudson Bay is equipped with only 15 long-term care beds to serve both a large geographic area and a large population. As you can imagine, this shortage is resulting in an increasingly large waiting list for people requiring long-term care. According to the town of Hudson Bay, complications have also occurred when acute care beds have had to be used by long-term care patients.

In the last several years, due to the shortage, many patients have been required to look to other centres for their long-term care needs. The closest facility from Hudson Bay is Tisdale which is 100 kilometres away.

One letter I received was from Elvina Rumak, whose mother

has been forced to go to Tisdale. I will read from her letter. I quote:

I have been making two trips a week to Tisdale for . . . visitations with my mother being the only child in this family — this costs approximately \$40 . . . (to) \$80 . . . (a trip and it) becomes quite costly and I do not know how long I can financially continue these frequent visitations.

Many citizens and organizations have devoted a great deal of time towards urging this government to assist their community with the changes necessary to allow for a minimum five long-term care bed expansion. They have written letters, compiled information, and distributed petitions and held meetings. This is something that is a great concern to many people and they feel that this issue needs to be addressed immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Christmas Message

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we prepare to leave this place, as we prepare to spend the balance of the season of peace and expectation with friends and family, I would like to refer to a Christmas radio message from 1975. Just as the first Christmas message long ago, what was said is particularly relevant today.

It was noted that while we yearn for peace, the world is constantly beset by war, terrorism, and violence. And yet Tommy Douglas said, and I quote:

The shepherds who heard the message of 'Peace on Earth' did not consider that to be a description of things as they were, but a vision of what they might be if we could learn to live together in a spirit of mutual goodwill and better understanding . . . Peace on Earth is not something we have achieved but something for which we must strive. If Christmas means anything, it should mean that, like the shepherds of old, we catch a vision of the world as it ought to be and not (just) as it is.

Mr. Speaker, our world today is beset by wars and rumours of wars. All the more reason then to gather together with loved ones, to reaffirm within ourselves that which inspires hope and trust, to observe the season in whatever manner is our custom, and to renew the seasonal pledge of goodwill to all.

As Tommy said:

If we and our children are going to live in a world at peace then the Spirit of Christmas must be part of our everyday living and permeate our national life.

Mr. Speaker, Merry Christmas to all; and to all members, peace.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

1A and 2A Provincial Volleyball Champions

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) we often wear a

different hat. Today I'm wearing two. One is the MLA for Rosetown-Biggan and the other is a proud parent.

The Beechy Blazers 1A senior girls volleyball windup party occurred at our house last night. The Blazers experienced a great season culminating in winning the 1A provincial volleyball championship in Imperial last month after a season of 43 wins and 0 losses against other 1A teams. In fact they were first or second in every tournament this year playing against even 2A, 3A, and 4A teams.

However there was one team that gave them a great deal of competition. That competition came from a 2A school, the Lucky Lake senior girls team who won the divisions. And congratulations also go out to the Lucky Lake 2A girls squad, who not only beat the Blazers on occasion but also went on to win a provincial championship of their own — the 2A provincial banner held in Allan.

Congratulations to the Beechy and Lucky Lake senior girls volleyball teams, their coaches, and proud parents on great seasons accompanied by great attitudes and great sportsmanship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SaskPower Dress-A-Champion

Mr. McCall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Saturday I had the great pleasure of attending the 10th annual Dress-A-Champion. The event is sponsored by SaskPower and supported by many other community groups. But the main drive behind this wonderful endeavour is Ehrlo Community Services Sport Venture, and they and their main organizer, Russ Matthews, do wonderful work.

Dress-A-Champion keeps up the claim of its name. It provides for the distribution of free hockey equipment to Regina and inner-city children — to kids that otherwise might not be able to afford the expensive essentials that go with hockey.

The event got its start in a classroom at Ranch Ehrlo in 1992 when Russ Matthews and his students set about working to remove the pricey barriers that otherwise might block kids without the money from the joy of hockey. Their efforts met with an enthusiastic response and in 1993 Russ and the gang set up the Outdoor Hockey League. The OHL has gone on to become a civic treasure, Mr. Speaker.

The value of the OHL and Dress-A-Champ was borne out this Saturday when over 100 volunteers worked with groups like SaskPower and Regina's Optimists to distribute 400 hockey sticks and 350 pairs of new and used skates.

What does the OHL and Dress-A-Champ mean to the kids? A quote from Russ Matthews:

The best thing I saw was one kid getting a new pair of shin pads. You should have seen the look in his eyes when he held them up. His eyes were so full of optimism and anticipation and excitement.

It spilled right across the Outdoor Hockey League, and I wish

Russ and all the volunteers and the players to keep on being champions and keep up the good work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Congratulations to New Saskatchewan Bar Member

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to congratulate Andrea Leaman Argue, originally of Chaplin, Saskatchewan, for recently being admitted to the Saskatchewan bar. In a bar admission ceremony conducted by the Hon. E.D. Bayda, Chief Justice for Saskatchewan, Andrea was recognized for obtaining the highest mark in the Saskatchewan bar exam for the year 2002.

Such accomplishments at a relatively young age are an indication of an individual with a good fundamental education and commitment to post-secondary studies. Obviously Andrea has worked very hard to achieve success that can be attributed to a strong work ethic, self-discipline, and a strong and supportive family environment.

I am especially pleased that Andrea has chosen to practise law in our province. While I am sure she will be a valuable asset to Anderson & Company law firm of Swift Current, she is an even greater asset to her community and to the future of Saskatchewan. I am confident her achievements will serve as an inspiration to future generations of Chaplin school students.

Her parents must be very proud. Andrea is the daughter of Ellis and Bev Leaman of Chaplin, Saskatchewan. Congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Crown Corporations

Mr. Adley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the future is wide open and Saskatchewan's Crown corporations have played an important role in the development of the province of Saskatchewan.

Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that the province's Crown corporations have strict buy-Saskatchewan policies and spend \$2 billion in our province every year on employee wages and local goods and services? The province's Crown corporations are important, respected customers of over 12,000 Saskatchewan businesses. Over 9,000 Saskatchewan people at work at our Crown corporations — half are located in non-urban communities throughout Saskatchewan.

(10:15)

Saskatchewan's four major Crown corporations partner with over 600 local dealers and brokers to deliver telecommunication, insurance, and natural gas services all across the province.

Crown corporations were established many years ago to provide utility and insurance services at affordable rates to people throughout the province, and that remains their number one job.

Since 1997 the Crowns have paid \$600 million to the General Revenue Fund. On 2002 earnings, CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) will pay another \$300 million in regular and deferred dividends.

Mr. Speaker, the Crowns will continue to fulfill their mandates as engines of growth and opportunity for our wide open future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Maintenance of the Diefenbaker Homestead

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

Last summer the provincial government closed the Diefenbaker homestead buildings. The original buildings dated from the turn of the last century at the family farm near Borden. They were relocated to Wascana Centre in 1967. As we move to our provincial centennial, this link with our past must not be lost.

Diefenbaker was Saskatchewan's only prime minister, the author of the first Bill of Rights, and a champion of civil liberties as demonstrated when he granted voting rights to First Nations.

In light of Mr. Diefenbaker's place in Canadian history, I call on the provincial government to provide the estimated \$11,000 required to maintain the homestead.

If the government does not consider the preservation of these buildings important to our history, they should say so clearly now. Then it will be up to Saskatchewan citizens to express whether they think the homestead is worth saving. Diefenbaker was a great believer in the wisdom of the people and it will be up to the average citizen to convince the government that history is worth preserving.

As Mr. Diefenbaker loved to quote, "a nation without a history has no future."

ORAL QUESTIONS

Investment in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

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

Yesterday the legislature made changes to The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Act. These changes will give the Wheat Pool the flexibility it needs to attract new private sector investment.

However before the Bill was even passed, the Minister of Agriculture was telling reporters that the NDP (New Democratic Party) is considering putting government money into the Pool. Mr. Speaker, the Pool now has the opportunity to attract private investment. It should be given the opportunity to do so. The last thing we need is the NDP pouring millions of taxpayers' dollars into a grain company.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Will the Premier give us assurance that his government will not be buying shares or providing any debt equity or financing to the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my comments this morning by saying exactly what I said yesterday to the media and to the people of Saskatchewan. And this is what I said to the media, and I say to the member opposite this morning and to this Assembly: that when the question was put to me about whether or not we've had any discussions with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, I said that we have had confidential discussions with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, like many other organizations across the province have had confidential discussions with the Wheat Pool because, Mr. Speaker, of their value to the province and agriculture in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, when I was asked by the media about whether or not this government was investing in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool through a share offering — and I say to the member from Rosetown-Biggar this morning — I said that there have been absolutely no commitments by this government and there have been absolutely no decisions by this government to make any kind of financial investments in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. And that is the position that we've taken, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the member opposite, we need to today recognize the kind of work the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has done in this province, and in the future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, this is not a debate about the importance and the role of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in Saskatchewan's economy. The minister is accurate in saying . . . in relating his comments to the media outside of this Assembly yesterday. In fact, the minister said that no decision had been made. No decision has been made. That's the problem, Mr. Speaker.

The legislation was passed yesterday by this Assembly. What we need now from the government is a confirmation or a denial that these discussions also involved the possible investment by the NDP government into the Wheat Pool. Mr. Speaker, it seems like a fairly simple question to ask on behalf of Saskatchewan taxpayers. And quite frankly, it deserves a straight and unequivocal answer — not one that no decision has yet been made.

Mr. Speaker, is the NDP government considering becoming a shareholder or a debt or equity investor in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool? Yes or no?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, yesterday the members opposite and members on this side of the House debated the importance of the changing of the legislation to allow the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Mr. Speaker, to proceed to do the kind of work that it needs to do.

And I say to the members opposite — and those on this side of the House already understand this, Mr. Speaker — that the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool today is undertaking a number of issues to secure their position as a significant corporate entity in our province.

And it would be unusual, Mr. Speaker, for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in my view not to have conversations with one of its greatest partners in this province which has been the Government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And irrespective of which political stripe has been in government in Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool has done business with them.

And I say to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and to this House, we need to cherish the work of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in this province, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the members opposite that there has been confidential conversations with the Wheat Pool, and there's been no commitments made with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Meeting with Electronic Data Systems Officials

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for the Crown Investments Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, there must be a serious shortage space . . . shortage of office space here in the city of Regina because yesterday we confirmed that the hand-picked . . . the NDP hand-picked president of CIC, Mr. Frank Hart, indicated that he had to fly all the way to Minnesota in August to tell EDS (Electronic Data Systems) that he wasn't interested in a proposal to privatize IT (information technology) jobs at SaskTel.

And while Mr. Hart was in Minneapolis, he decided to take in a couple of rounds of PGA (Professional Golf Association) golf at the PGA championship, and dinner just outside the city.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan and EDS have plenty of office space and boardrooms right here in the city. And SaskTel, frankly, has some pretty decent long-distance rates.

Mr. Speaker, why couldn't the NDP's hand-picked president of CIC meet with EDS officials that are already here in Regina or just pick up the phone instead of flying all the way to Minnesota for dinner and a golf tournament?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I need to first of all, Mr. Speaker, report to the Assembly that I had an awful night's sleep last night, Mr. Speaker.

I was visited last night by that ghost of Christmas past, Mr. Speaker. I was visited by the ghost of Christmas past, Mr. Speaker, and you know what? It was a little fellow playing a guitar inviting me to visit the Country Music Hall of Fame, Mr. Speaker. It was awful. I tossed and I turned all night, Mr. Speaker. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? When I woke up this morning and realized that it wasn't true, Mr. Speaker, I felt wonderful.

If they'd just get on the program and realize that we have a bright, important, wonderful, great future here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and quit criticizing every positive economic

development initiative that this government takes part in, all of us would be better off.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — You know, Mr. Speaker, the real nightmare in this province — the real nightmare in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, is this NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, when they don't have an answer or when they refuse to answer, they fill in with really lame and bad jokes, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is the same minister, the one that just got up with his attempt at humour, this is the same minister that called a \$28 million loss at SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Corporation) a large success, Mr. Speaker.

This is the same minister who refuses to comment on what apparently were actions by him to sabotage a private sector company.

This is the same minister that refuses to answer questions about one of the biggest cover-ups in modern political history in this province — that's spudgate, Mr. Speaker. That's who we're talking about here.

Well now this particular minister has a senior official who needs to travel all the way to Minnesota to meet with EDS (Electronic Data Systems) officials to say no, we're not interested in a proposal.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the minister is this: when will he get a handle on his portfolio? When will he start providing answers to the Assembly and when will he start controlling Mr. Frank Hart over at the CIC offices?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well this member and this party can continue to criticize our public servants, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that the president of Crown Investments Corporation has a role, Mr. Speaker, in our government and that is, Mr. Speaker, to attract every and investigate every economic initiative that he possibly can check, Mr. Speaker, to try and bring jobs back to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The proposal that was presented would have brought some hundreds of jobs to this province and if that member is now suggesting that our president, a senior official in charge of economic development, should not be investigating and trying to attract business to Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, they should stand up and say so. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important that our senior officials, our senior officials in government, Mr. Speaker, seek out every positive initiative that they possibly can around economic development.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Treaty Land Entitlement Claims

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my office is being flooded with calls and letters from ranchers in southwest Saskatchewan who fear that they may lose their land

and their livelihood as part of the government's treaty land entitlement process. Massive claims involving thousands of acres of Crown land is affected, and all of this land is leased by ranchers. Some of the land has been in the family for three generations, and now these ranchers believe that they may be forced to give the land up, rendering their operations completely uneconomic.

Mr. Speaker, these ranchers have always been of the understanding that they would be given the first opportunity to renew when the lease expires. That has been government policy. Will it continue as government policy? Will the government guarantee that no one will be forced to give up lease land they are currently ranching, as part of a treaty land entitlement claim?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, the member asks a very important question — a very important question, Mr. Speaker. And not only does the member ask a very important question in terms of how it affects the future of ranchers in Saskatchewan, the member also asks a very fundamental and important question about what will be the decisions regarding the agreements that the province has signed regarding First Nations treaty eligibility.

Because we have an agreement in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, which we entered with First Nations in which they can select property across the . . . or across our province. And we have long-standing leases today, Mr. Speaker, with agricultural families today, and farmers and ranchers.

And today I can say to the member opposite, we're engaged in this important discussion. We're engaged in this discussion about determining how and where and in what fashion we're able to work out a solution, a solution that will be helpful to meet the obligations under the treaty land entitlement, and a solution, Mr. Speaker, that will be helpful to ensure that ranchers in Saskatchewan who make a living, Mr. Speaker, off the management of the livestock industry and growing it.

So we're working today, Mr. Speaker, with First Nations people and ranchers to find a solution.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned this government was haunted by ghosts of deals past, present, and future. Today we're realizing that this government may actually be the grinch that stole Christmas for ranch families in the Southwest.

Mr. Speaker, the first of these land claims was filed with this government at the beginning of October — the beginning of October, Mr. Speaker. The government has 90 days to respond and it's supposed to immediately notify all affected third parties. However, ranchers are telling me, Mr. Speaker, that the first they heard of these land claims was late in November. So the NDP had already circumvented the 90-day response time by 60 days.

Mr. Speaker, these people in the Southwest deserve answers,

but they aren't getting any from this government. No one in this NDP administration will give any of my constituents a straight answer. All they get is bafflegab.

(10:30)

Tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Speaker, there will be a public meeting on this issue in the Lancer hall. I will be there. The Premier, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs have also been invited. I expect they too will attend.

Mr. Speaker, here is the question my constituents want answered. Will the current leaseholders be forced off their land as part of this government's efforts to satisfy the treaty land entitlement claims?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member's description of the issue in his part of the province and I understand it fully because I've been meeting with ranchers in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, for the past year and a half. I understand this issue, Mr. Speaker, not only in his part of the province but also across the province.

And I'm offended to hear the member say that these are going to be some kind of — and he uses the word deals. These are not individual, special deals for anybody, Mr. Speaker.

These are public policy as it relates to the leasing of agricultural land, Mr. Speaker, and it is now in legislation, Mr. Speaker. We now have in legislation today, Mr. Speaker, an agreement with First Nations people about processes, which aren't just in Saskatchewan but are national, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the member opposite that we have today, Mr. Speaker, people who will be attending the meeting tomorrow in Lancer and I say to the members opposite, we have a long-term policy in terms of how we manage Saskatchewan. I'll be interested to know what their policy is, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Firearm Registration

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. The Government of Nunavut has been successful in winning a court injunction that will protect Inuit from prosecution for not registering firearms by January 1.

The federal government has argued their new firearms registration system is necessary to protect people, prevent crime, and give police information as to who owns firearms. How does allowing one group of people an exemption achieve those goals? If the federal court decision contemplates an exemption for one group of gun owners, in this case the Inuit, then gun registry fails to meet the federal government's stated reasons for establishing it in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, will the provincial government seek a similar injunction for Saskatchewan citizens while the courts deal with the legal challenge in Nunavut?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a matter which has plagued Canada for a long time. This government, as the member will know, has been steadfast in its opposition to the gun registry. And indeed all parties in this legislature have been steadfastly opposed to the registration simply because, Mr. Speaker, as we all know, it won't work, and it won't do anything to ensure safety and security in our communities by attacking responsible firearms owners.

Let me just say on the matter the member raises, the litigation instigated by First Nations people across this country is supported by firearms owners in this province. I've met with them on many occasions and they support the actions of the First Nations, Mr. Speaker, primarily because they want to ensure that the registry is not . . . is no longer in place.

Mr. Speaker, the member raises the important question of disparities across this country, it's a matter we consider very carefully. The fact of the matter remains, Mr. Speaker, that I think everybody in this House is opposed to the registry and we will continue to take that position.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well we're glad to hear that the Minister of Justice is supportive of this. The federal government has given a court injunction which exempts one group of people in Canada from having to register their firearms on January 1, 2003, while everyone else is required to do so. Failure to register firearms or to own unregistered firearms could result in criminal charges.

Mr. Speaker, it isn't fair. And the exemption of one group of firearms owners from the new federal law also undermines the federal government's stated purpose for establishing the gun registry in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, in Canada the law should apply to all citizens equally. Will the Minister of Justice seek an injunction exempting Saskatchewan firearms owners from registration requirements until the court action in Nunavut is concluded?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Let me just say that I'll consider that option and see how best to, see how best to proceed, Mr. Speaker. If that's an option which appears to be workable, then we'll certainly implement it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Crop Insurance

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Throughout this session we've heard the NDP government blame the drought for their growing deficit. They've blamed the struggling agriculture economy for their huge provincial debt. They've used the tough times in agriculture as an easy excuse for so many problems of their own making.

So let's see exactly how serious the NDP take the financial difficulties being faced by the farm families today. Mr. Speaker, today the Saskatchewan Party will be introducing a motion calling on the NDP government to allow crop producers the option of not using the yields from this last devastating drought year in the calculation of their five-year crop year average which determines their crop insurance coverage for the next crop year.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister and that NDP government support this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for some weeks for the member opposite to come to her feet and talk a little bit about agricultural policy in Saskatchewan . . . (inaudible) . . . weeks, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, and I say to this House, thank you very much to the members opposite for not injecting themselves in rural policy. Thank you very much. Because every time the members opposite and the Leader of the Opposition inject themselves in rural agricultural policy, we have an absolute mess, Mr. Speaker — an absolute mess. And so thank you very much to the members opposite for not injecting yourself in agricultural policy for the last year and a half.

I say to the members opposite . . . And the member opposite said to me, and the member from Kindersley, who is now here, a year and a half ago or year ago said to me, you know what? We've got a plan in agriculture and you're going to see our plan last February in agriculture. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? We've seen nothing from them.

Mr. Speaker, we have a group of men and women — 25 men and women from rural Saskatchewan — who have no idea about agriculture in rural Saskatchewan, no idea.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, how dare that Agriculture minister blame the opposition for the problems in agriculture. That government and that minister are the ones that hiked the premiums in crop insurance. They stripped the variable price option and they've axed the spot loss hail coverage and they're blaming the opposition for all their problems.

Mr. Speaker, there will be many farmers in this coming year whose coverage will be so low due to the five-year average yield being down that it just won't even pay for them to participate in the crop insurance program.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government blames its own fiscal situation on the drought just like they're blaming the opposition for all their problems in agriculture, so I'm sure they also realize that the situation for crop producers that have been through one and possibly two years of drought. Why then, Mr. Speaker, will they not support this motion today that will help the producers for 2003?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, we've come through, in Saskatchewan, the worst drought in the history of our province. And what have we done for agricultural producers, Mr. Speaker? This year, Mr. Speaker, we put money into a hay program for livestock producers in Saskatchewan. And what does the opposition . . . the opposition said well that's a good thing I guess. But we heard nothing from them.

Mr. Speaker, we put money today in a hog program because the prices are lower, Mr. Speaker, and producers say thank you very much. And what did the opposition say? Oh this is not a bad thing. You know, finally they wake up to the idea that we have a crisis in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And this year, Mr. Speaker, we negotiated with the federal government to change the formula for western provinces on Fredericton. And you know what the member opposite from Watrous said in August? She said, you should go to Ottawa and negotiate a deal accepting what we have from Ottawa. And I have her quote, Mr. Speaker, from August. And today, Mr. Speaker . . . today, Mr. Speaker, we negotiated for Saskatchewan and Western provinces the best agricultural formula that this country has ever seen. And what did the member opposite say? Sign the deal in August.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Performance of Government and Opposition

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess it's fitting that there's a snowstorm on the last day of this session because that's all we got from the NDP for eight days, is a big snow job. Mr. Speaker, we asked them how big is the deficit; they wouldn't answer. We asked them about the cover-up in SPUDCO; they wouldn't answer. We asked them about the status of their investment in FarmGro; they wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole.

Mr. Speaker, then we asked them if they planned to put taxpayers' money in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. And again even today, they would not answer. Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people deserve better than what they're getting from an unelected Premier of an unaccountable government, a government that even lost the popular vote in the last election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, this government has blatantly refused to answer questions. Why is the NDP so afraid to stand up and defend their record and to answer the questions of the people of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these past eight days of sitting have provided to the opposition, the opposition party, an opportunity for once — for once — to come forward with a new substantive idea and a plan. Eight days of sitting, not one new idea, not one plan, Mr. Speaker. What have we heard? Day after day the sloganeering of that opposition party. The sloganeering, no plan.

Compare that with a government, Mr. Speaker, who has a plan in agriculture, who has a plan in health care leading the nation, a plan in education, a plan for ethanol, a plan to grow the economy of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Everything we say we're doing, they say can't be done. Well I say, Mr. Speaker, those who say it can't be done should not be interrupting those who are doing it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, my colleague just came forward with an idea for crop insurance. They weren't listening.

Mr. Speaker, we have an NDP . . . we have an NDP government that can't even spell the Premier's name. Mr. Speaker, the NDP can't balance the budget. They won't take responsibility for the millions of dollars that they've squandered. They won't answer any questions about their actions. So really, Mr. Speaker, there's only one question left to ask and that is, when's the election?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — We need an election so we can get this province back on track. We need an election to stop the NDP from blowing millions and millions of taxpayers' dollars. Mr. Speaker, we need an election so we can get Saskatchewan growing again.

Mr. Speaker, that election can't come soon enough. Will the Premier bring some Christmas cheer to Saskatchewan by calling an election so the people of this province can give themselves a gift, and that is the gift of good government, a Saskatchewan Party government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition now wants to talk about our party conventions. Let me talk about their party convention.

You know, he denied his party members the right to debate public policy at his convention. They had one little resolution about Kyoto they debated in five minutes.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, he came into this session saying that that was going to be the big issue. The big issue in this session was going to be about Kyoto. We had a vote on Kyoto. The Leader of the Opposition didn't even show up for the vote.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Calvert: — Now, Mr. Speaker, you bet. You bet I'm looking forward, I'm looking forward to meeting that Leader of the Opposition and that party in a general provincial election because we'll be talking about our plan for Saskatchewan — a plan that's working. And we'll point out the slogan that is their plan.

Or, Mr. Speaker, just a moment. Maybe I err. Maybe they do have a plan; they're just not willing to tell us what that plan is. Maybe that's the problem.

Now I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition today, I'm looking forward, I'm looking forward to meeting that Leader of the Opposition — not the leader from Swift Current, but that leader — meeting him in Rosetown. I'll meet him in Riversdale, I'll meet him in Regina, I'll meet him in Radville. And when that election is over, they'll have . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(10:45)

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

Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I would ask the member just to defer . . . I would ask the member to defer his point of order for a few moments because I prefer to deal with a point of order one at a time and I have not yet responded to the previous point of order.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling on a Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday the Opposition House Leader raised a point of order regarding the relevancy of certain answers given by members of the executive. I wish to thank the Deputy Government House Leader as well, in addition to the Opposition House Leader for their comments.

I have reviewed the record and note that on several occasions over the past week the opposition has indicated, both on and off the record, its dissatisfaction with the answers given.

The Opposition House Leader quoted paragraph 417 of Beauchesne's 6th edition which directs that:

Answers to questions should . . . deal with the subject matter raised . . .

I further note that he was correct in his comments when he referenced this Assembly's practice of giving ministers a great deal of latitude in answering questions.

For his part, the Government Deputy House Leader was also correct in noting that it is entirely within the purview of the government and its ministers to address a question in the way that they consider most appropriate. The corollary to this statement is that answers may be given that are procedurally correct but which may not contain the information that the questioner sought.

The role of the Speaker in these . . . Order. Order, please. The role of the Speaker in these circumstances is restricted to applying the applicable rules and procedures. I direct members to a ruling made on December 22, 1986 in which my predecessor stated:

I want to re-emphasize that the Chair cannot insist that a

minister must answer a question a certain way. As long as the answer is relevant, it is in order . . .

Order, please. Order.

As long as the answer is relevant, it is in order even if the answer isn't the one the questioner was seeking. I define relevancy in answers in the same broad way as in all debates in the Assembly. A remark is relevant if it deals with the topic raised . . .

I indicated yesterday that I would bring back guidelines, and I intend to do so now.

First, I remind all members of the purpose for question period. Question period is a forum in which to seek information, publicize government programs and decisions, and to hold the executive accountable for its actions.

Concisely phrased questions and responses will uphold these purposes. Rambling preambles that contain extraneous matter only invite rambling responses. If a member . . . if members wish to have direct answers, they would be well advised to limit the extraneous matter that they include in their preambles.

Secondly, question period was not intended merely as a warm up for events later in the day, such as media scrums. I remind all members that they remain accountable to this Assembly first. It is a long-established, parliamentary tradition that, whenever possible, important matters should be dealt with first in this Assembly.

The growing willingness to provide information, to inform outside this chamber when it may have been done in the chamber, is eroding this tradition and reflects poorly on members' respect for each other and for the legislature.

Finally, I share the concerns raised in the point of order that some ministerial responses are occasionally straying beyond the boundaries of what is an acceptable level of relevance to the topic raised in the question.

In keeping with the important role of this Assembly, I ask ministers to ensure their responses relate to the questions while respecting the restrictions of the *sub judice* convention.

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Would the member state his point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, it's a long-standing rule and practice in this House that the attendance or absence of members is not to be included in the debate and *Hansard*.

We have observed that in noting the attendance or absence of the Premier, Mr. Speaker, and not commenting on it.

I would ask that the Premier be instructed to not comment on the absence or attendance of members either in debate or in

question period as he just did.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, in response to the House Leader's point of order, I do refer you and the House, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier's reference in question period today to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition from a vote — from a vote.

And I refer you, Mr. Speaker, and all hon. members to page 4 of the *Votes and Proceedings* of Wednesday, December 11 in which is recorded for public consumption — is on the record — the vote taken on the Kyoto debate here in the House.

Mr. Speaker, on the recorded division, on the recorded division, in which the names of all members are listed as they voted on the amendment, Mr. Speaker, there were 22 yeas, all of whom were members of the opposition, and not among those listed is the Leader of the Opposition.

On the motion then, Mr. Speaker, when it was put, among the 22 nays, again where members are listed, the names of the members, all of the opposition, but among them is not listed the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, on the public record on the vote, on the vote, is listed the absence of the Leader of the Opposition when voting on the Kyoto resolutions in this House. Purely and simply, Mr. Speaker, that is . . . that was the reference of the Premier in the debate and I would urge you to find that the hon. member's point of order is not well taken.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Members, while I might like to allow myself the luxury of taking some time to look at these, I think the ruling might become quite moot if I don't say something at this time.

So I would just like to bring to the members' attention, first of all, that they should not . . . be reminded of the rule that we should not do indirectly what we can do directly. That is, bringing any comment or making any comment indirectly which it could be interpreted that if you're talking about a vote, that it may imply that that member is . . . has not been present.

However that is . . . there are ways of saying that a vote, referring to a vote, which I think is quite proper, that will not necessarily imply the absence or presence of the member. However, and I do hold the point . . . uphold the point of order that the member is not to refer to anybody's presence or absence in the legislature and I would ask members to observe that.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to stand on behalf of the government and table the responses to written questions nos. 482 through 496, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Government Whip has submitted

responses to written questions 482 through to 496.

Order, please. Why is the member from Watrous on her feet?

Ms. Harpauer: — With leave to move a motion under rule no. 46.

Leave granted.

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Crop Insurance

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — It's rather appropriate, Mr. Speaker, that rule no. 46 allows me to propose a motion. It has to be in a motion that's urgent and with pressing necessity, and considering that both the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture asked for our ideas on what we could do about agriculture and the difficulties they're facing, this becomes more urgent and pressing because this is what the government itself has asked for.

I'd like to take a few minutes because this is the season of reflection. And I want to reflect through the challenges in agriculture, in the whole entire industry throughout the year of 2002. And at the end of recapping what has happened in Saskatchewan in agriculture in 2002, I will be moving a motion that will encourage the government to make changes to crop insurance that will assist the producers to face the challenges that I know that they are going to have to meet for the crop year in 2003.

I don't believe that we in this province could ever be more acutely aware of the extreme adverse effects of the failure of this NDP government to implement a meaningful . . . or a safety net program over the last 10 years — a safety net that would have not solved all of the problems of this year, for sure, Mr. Speaker, but it would have been a cushion. The producers could have entered the year in 2002 with a little more . . . a little more prepared financially, actually, to face the fact that we've had a severe drought.

The NDP government has repeatedly blamed the challenges in agriculture industry for their own financial woes. They say that they're in financial difficulty because of the agriculture problem. And now today obviously the minister thinks that there's difficulties in the agriculture because of the opposition party — that we've created the problems in the agriculture industry.

And this demonstrates in my mind like nothing else that there's a total lack of vision, there's a lack of planning for the future, and there's a lack of prioritizing spending in this province shown by the NDP government. And it's negatively impacting, Mr. Speaker, not just agriculture and agriculture producers, it is now to the scale where it's negatively impacting the whole entire province.

(11:00)

And when you have a year such as we had . . . And I'll use the minister's own words, when you have a year that's a wreck — and indeed 2002 has been a wreck for the agriculture producers — when you have a year that's a wreck and you've entered that wreck already crippled by the lack of safety nets in place, a lack of support from both levels of government, then it is extremely difficult to face the challenges of that wreck, Mr. Speaker.

So let's just review 2002 and we'll begin with . . . You know, we'll review what the NDP government has done to rectify the fact that they have neglected implementing a safety net program — a safety net program, by the way, that they promised in each and every budget throughout their governing years; a safety net that they promised would replace the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) program which they themselves tore up. And let's just review and see, and I think we will demonstrate quite easily the lack of vision that's been demonstrated by that Agriculture minister.

And it probably does explain, Mr. Speaker, why that Agriculture minister repeatedly says what's the opposition party's ideas, because he has none of his own. So he needs someone to give him some ideas.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, one of the first things that I notice when I look back through 2002 was the lack of the property land tax rebate. And a lot of people listening to this may wonder what the property tax rebate was, and indeed I can understand why — because it no longer exists.

It was a program. It was a two-year program that the Agriculture minister of the day said would help the producers address the fact that commodity prices were low, that the input costs were increasing. And although they didn't admit it, the fact is they've downloaded education funding quite shamefully on to agriculture producers — and on property owners as a whole in this province, not just agriculture producers.

So they said, due to the difficult times, they would implement a property land tax rebate and they carried it for two years. And what happened in 2002? Well even though those difficulties were still there — these were difficulties that the government acknowledged and recognized — they took the program away and they just ripped that away.

It kind of sounds like another program that they had done that to before that. I think it was called GRIP, Mr. Speaker, and they pulled the pin on that just as quickly.

Mr. Speaker, even implementing the program, I would like to point out . . . And this is just one example that I'm going to demonstrate where the minister tends to message the good things he's going to do for agriculture in the province. He tends to tout it as if he's doing it because he understands the industry and because he understands the difficulties. But in fact, I believe — and the fact they took it away substantiates that belief — that the only reason why they even implemented the program in the first place was not because they were going to take responsibility for the fact that they've downloaded education funding on to property owners, but rather because there was a rapidly accelerating tax revolt that was happening in rural Saskatchewan and they didn't know how to deal with it.

So the way they chose to deal with it was to put that rebate in place to encourage the property owners to indeed pay their taxes. Because of course, and understandably so, they had to pay their taxes in order to qualify for the rebate. And the minute that those property owners complied, they ripped the program away. So that is the first initiative that this particular Agriculture minister can brag about that he did to help out the agriculture producers in this province.

The next initiatives, Mr. Speaker, is what I heard this minister call is an enhanced crop insurance. The forms arrived for that said enhanced program two weeks late, and as the producers soon found out many, many dollars short. And of course it's no surprise that the Agriculture minister said that the reason why it's late is it's the federal government's fault. And the reason why it was a few dollars short was, well that's the federal government's fault.

But as typical of this particular Agriculture minister, the one that we have today, the one that we're relying on and should be able to trust today, he announced details of the 2002 crop insurance program, Mr. Speaker, and he said — he admitted — that producers would have to pay 7 per cent more for their share of the reduced program. Now, Mr. Speaker, he led the producers to believe that the delay in the crop insurance was because there would be more enhanced programs in the crop insurance program. That's why it was delayed.

The reason why, he gave the producers, that there was a 7 per cent increase was because the federal government didn't pony up with their share of the money. And yet Mr. Vanclief in the federal government says it simply isn't so. It was something that this Agriculture minister and department had borrowed and so therefore they had to repay.

But regardless of who is responsible for the 20 million — and as the minister says, that created the 7 per cent increase — he told the producers there will be a 7 per cent increase. When the producers received their crop insurance forms those premium increases, Mr. Speaker, were 40, 50 and even 60 per cent increased.

Oats was up 30 per cent. Canola was up 38 per cent. Durum was up 44 per cent. Chickpeas was up by 45 per cent. Barley was up by 50 per cent. And the premium for lentils, Mr. Speaker, the premium for lentils was up 64 per cent.

Now I realize there are times when we can make mathematical errors but that goes far beyond a minor mathematical error. It all goes in messaging and how this minister messages what he is doing for the agriculture producers and how he deceives the producers of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this so-called enhanced crop insurance dropped spot loss hail. It was something that was well liked by the producers so I'm sure that's one of the reasons why he would need to scrap it. It was well received and there were very, very few complaints on the spot loss hail option that our crop insurance program used to offer.

It dropped the variable price option and again that was a critical option, especially for this year. And a lot of producers who have done the calculations now that the crop year is over — and I

should say the crop is in the bins but unfortunately that's not the case this year, Mr. Speaker — but they've done the math; they've pencilled out what the loss of the variable price option has cost them. And it's dramatic, Mr. Speaker.

And so basically the only thing that they've enhanced in this enhanced crop insurance program was the premium, Mr. Speaker, and that's shameful. And yet that minister will stand up and he will say time and time again that he has done so much for the producers of this province.

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't mention something that was added to the crop insurance program, and that was the little rainfall roulette game that he included in his crop insurance.

Only . . . well actually less than 5 per cent of the farmers could participate in that program and it defied all logic in its design. It did absolutely nothing to address the hurt where it was, because you could bid on any rain station no matter where it was or where you lived. But in defence of that little program that he ran in his crop insurance this year, it did become great coffee shop talk. It became a good joke and that's about all it did to help agriculture this year.

Later in June, Mr. Speaker, the long-awaited federal agriculture package was finally announced, and sadly it was far short of the billion-dollar trade injury payment that we had hoped for and I know that the government had hoped for. In fact if the province chose not to participate, it only would amount to approximately \$2 an acre for Saskatchewan producers.

And in all honesty it should be entitled the Saskatchewan government fiscal irresponsibility impact compensation program, because if we do the math on what the producers had to pay extra this year with this Agriculture minister saying that he's helping them so much — well the NDP government jacked up crop insurance rates and that cost the producers about approximately \$4 an acre; and the NDP and that Agriculture minister cancelled spot loss hail so that cost the agriculture producers about \$3.50 per acre; and the NDP cancelled the farm land property tax rebate so that cost the producers about 50 cents an acre.

So without even factoring in the huge loss farmers realized because the NDP cancelled the variable price option — without even using that calculation, Mr. Speaker — that's a net loss to the producers in Saskatchewan of \$6 an acre. That's how that Agriculture minister has helped producers in this province.

This is his vision. It's no wonder he keeps saying to the opposition party, to myself, Mr. Speaker, what's your plan, what's your idea? Obviously his ideas aren't working all that great. And this is why, Mr. Speaker, that minister doesn't have a hope; he doesn't have a prayer, Mr. Speaker, of winning the next election.

As we continue down memory lane, Mr. Speaker, following session both leaders, the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition, embarked on provincial tours. The Leader of the Opposition visited a number of drought-devastated farm land municipalities. The leader of the NDP, which is our Premier, Mr. Speaker, visited pancake

breakfasts, ball tournaments, golf courses.

And the final result, Mr. Speaker, of these two tours that were conducted at the same time was the opposition party proposed a six-point plan of changes — and albeit it wasn't enough but it was what we could fiscally afford — a six-point plan of changes that could be made to crop insurance that could ease some of the pressure that the producers were facing due to the drought.

The NDP came back from their tour and proposed nothing, absolutely nothing. They could . . . Well no, that's not true, Mr. Speaker. What they did was they criticized our six-point plan, said that it wasn't, it wasn't good enough. It wasn't going to make a difference. It wasn't going to help. And he proposed nothing. And that is again characteristic of what this minister has been doing for agricultural producers in the province.

The messaging that he uses is alarmingly deceptive. And it was never more apparent than when he finally made an announcement. And he finally did, in . . . when he announced the drought package that they were . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Now why is the member for Saskatoon Northwest on his feet?

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your gallery we have seated two individuals who I met with earlier today. And they are doing some very powerful and compelling work in the province of Saskatchewan right now. We have Judge David Arnot, the Treaty Commissioner, from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. And with him, Michael LeClaire of School^{PLUS} fame who now is the director of education in the Office of the Treaty Commissioner.

They are currently meeting with officials and will be meeting with officials from my department with regard to a proposal for education that is very broad based, that deals with curriculum development on increasing education in our system with regard to treaties, and improving relationships across society.

I'm very pleased to have met with them earlier today. And I would ask all members of the Assembly to welcome them here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(11:15)

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And as well, my welcome to the guests that were already introduced, but I'd like to introduce another gentleman in the gallery, Lionel Labelle. Now I don't want him to be implicated by my introducing him because I know that in the Labelle family politics float freely.

But his sister Pamela Labelle is a very good friend of mine and Lionel, although a bunch of his background has been with agriculture, is doing a lot of innovative consulting work and particularly lately with people with disabilities. And we've discussed some interesting ideas.

So I'd just like the Assembly to join me in welcoming Lionel here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — With leave to introduce guests. And I also would like to join with the previous member in welcoming Lionel Labelle to the Assembly.

Lionel is originally from Sedley, Saskatchewan and his family ran a dealership there in Sedley. And I know we went over and bought a number of pieces of equipment. And I always thought it was interesting how long it took some days for a deal to be closed in the Labelle shop as Dad seemed to spend a lot of time after the deal was formalized.

But, anyway, I'd like to welcome Lionel to the Assembly and hope he enjoys his stay.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests. Mr. Speaker, I want to join with my colleagues who have recognized the members who are here today in your gallery as our guests.

I do want to, in particular however, Mr. Speaker, to recognize a Mr. Michael LeClaire because when I was the Minister of Education, I had the opportunity of touring his school, Nutana high school in the province, where Mr. LeClaire was the principal.

And I have to say that when I had the opportunity of touring the school, I recognized the tremendous work that he was doing in integrating public service and the school system.

And it's from that meeting that we had that grew the Role of the School and which has been a tremendous document which Minister Melenchuk has taken on. The minister from Northwest/Learning has taken forward and now built a very strong program in Saskatchewan.

But you should know, Mr. Speaker, that the key principals in getting this project on its way was Michael LeClaire. And I want to thank him for the tremendous work that he's done not only in his school, but for the policy position that we've taken in this province which by and way has been spawned by his work at Nutana, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Crop Insurance (continued)

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I

was mentioning prior to the introduction of guests, that the messaging . . . producers have caught on very quickly that they have to be very cautious about the messaging that they get from this Agriculture minister. He rolled out a multi-million dollar package which was his drought package for this summer. In reality it only added \$20 million of additional drought assistance.

He tried very hard to make it sound like it was far more dollars, Mr. Speaker, but it only took very little time in fact for everyone to realize that that was not the case. In fact it was less than half the amount that the NDP cut out of the agriculture this spring when it cancelled the farm land property tax rebate alone. It was less than that.

Throughout all of this there's also been the ongoing federal APF (agricultural policy framework) negotiations — negotiations that this NDP minister has had little participation in, to my knowledge. And it demonstrates again, more than ever, that he has . . . he's lacking in leadership on this particular issue.

He's also lacking in a clear, clear message. First he's going to sign; he's not going to sign; he is going to sign; he's not going to sign. It's like the rainbow flavour of the week, from one week to the next, what he's going to tell media what we're going to do. There's a lack of leadership and a lack of direction and a lack of vision by this minister.

And now I read an article — not all that long ago, Mr. Speaker — that apparently there was a meeting and there's concerns by the ministers of where the APF negotiations are going. And they're concerned that perhaps the planning of a new safety net, a new program, will be lacking because it's going to be rushed. And they're saying why do we rush it; why don't we do a good job? And yet, in that case, our Agriculture minister who hasn't signed, who hasn't been participating, Saskatchewan minister, Clay Serby who has not signed the APF said, he does not — meaning he does not want to wait.

I wish he would let Saskatchewan know what his plan is at the end of the day on this. Where is it going? I have placed phone call after phone call to that minister, who has never returned my phone calls, and all I wanted to know was how those negotiations were going.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again we hear the minister say what's your plan. We hear the media and the public, and quite justifiably, say where's the money going to come from?

Well, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take too long to know that there isn't a lot of money that's going to be available for agriculture programs, but we could start with \$20 million that was spent on the dot-com company in Atlanta, Georgia. We could discuss, and have discussed at length, the \$28 million that was blown in the successful — so-called successful — enterprise in SPUDCO. There's \$6 million that was spent not all that long ago in Chile. There was \$15 million that was spent in Mexico. There's \$88 million that was spent in our land titles Crown corporation that just simply isn't working. Recently, \$80 million in Australia and now I read that they want to invest money in India.

So perhaps there is money for agriculture programs. There is

money to do something meaningful, but you need to prioritize your spending, Mr. Speaker. It is ultimately important and it's particularly important when we're in a situation where, as the minister would say, we're having a wreck.

Mr. Speaker, the motion that I want to bring forward is addressing crop insurance and a small change that could be made. Presently there's a clause in crop insurance that you take your last five years, your own farming practice record, and that's averaged and that's the basis that your present year's coverage is calculated on.

And this government said time and time again that the huge deficit that they're facing is because of the drought. This is circumstances that's out of their control. Well I say that the problems that the agricultural producers are facing is also out of their control. It's not reflective of their farming practice or the ability of their soil on their farm to produce.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move this motion, seconded by the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood:

That this Assembly urge the provincial government to take the necessary action to give farmers covered by Saskatchewan Crop Insurance the option to omit the 2002 crop year when calculating their long-term average yield in recognition of the devastating drought that struck our province this year.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly pleased to be entering into the debate on this motion.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at this past year of 2002, particularly from the agriculture producers, the grain and oilseed producers of our province, and we looked at the various parts of the province, we will see two extremes. In the central and northwestern part of the province and the northern part of the province we had what was . . . been termed by Environment Canada as probably the worst drought on record. Yet in other parts of the province, particularly the southeast, we had excessive rainfall. And that excessive rainfall extended into parts of central and northern parts of the province during the harvest.

So to say that this production year has been a trying one is a huge understatement, Mr. Speaker. We had areas of the province which produced nothing. There were farms, farmers who, in 30 and 40 years of farming, never took their combine out of the shed for the . . . and that was for the first time in those 30 or 40 years. And in other parts of the province, Mr. Speaker, we had farmers not able to get out and harvest all their crop because of excessive flooding.

So when we are faced with these extreme conditions, I think we need to make some changes to some of the programs — particularly crop insurance. And I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this motion that the member from Watrous put forward should be very strongly considered by the Minister of Agriculture and that change should be made to the crop insurance program.

Certainly there are producers who would want to include the 2002 yield data in this year's . . . in the average calculation

because they had some pretty good yields and they would want to incorporate them to bring their average yield for their farm up. But there are producers in the drought area of the province and some of those producers have suffered severe drought for two, three, and four years —and with this year being the worst of those drought years — who would benefit greatly by having the option to not include this year's yield data because they had no yield, Mr. Speaker. And being able to omit that from the rolling average would be hugely beneficial, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this . . . as I said, this year has been a very unusual year and for those people who . . . and those farmers who have lived and farm in the worst drought area, it has been a very devastating and challenging year. And, Mr. Speaker, this comes in a year where this government and this Minister of Agriculture made some very detrimental and harmful changes to crop insurance, Mr. Speaker.

It has been calculated that due to the two changes alone of withdrawing spot loss hail and the variable price option, at the very least, farmers of this province suffered negatively to the tune of, at the very least, \$150 million, Mr. Speaker. And that is a very conservative calculation.

I raised the issue with the Minister of Agriculture during estimates earlier this year with regards to the withdrawal of spot loss hail and he agreed that that move alone would probably cost the farmers of this province an additional \$50 million in increased hail insurance coverage . . . costs, I should say.

Also, then if we look at the variable price option, if crop insurance is estimating a billion dollar payout, the variable price option allows commodity prices to rise by 25 per cent. And, Mr. Speaker, all commodity prices have risen dramatically this year because of the crop failures in Canada and the United States and in other parts of the world.

So if that option had have been available to the producers, and granted not all producers would have selected that option, but if all the producers had of selected that option they could have actually seen their crop insurance coverage increase by another 25 per cent or an additional \$250 million. But as I said, not all of them would have selected it so in my calculations I lowered that number to 100 million just to . . . and as I said, I think that's on the low side.

So just to reiterate, the two changes that that minister made this year cost the producers of this province at a very minimum \$150 million.

And so now what we are asking . . . We've asked that minister, the Minister of Agriculture, to not make those changes earlier on when the program was first announced. He refused. So now what we are asking — and this is by and large no cost to the program or very little cost to the program — is to at least give the producers the option of eliminating this year's coverage, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and the reason why this is important if we look forward to what could happen next year and in following years, if we look at what some of our . . . what Environment Canada is saying, what Dr. Peter Leavitt here at the U of R (University of Regina) is saying, is that Western Canada and Saskatchewan

included, there's a real chance of us seeing more drought in the upcoming years.

Dr. Peter Leavitt has said that the prairies could relive the droughts of the '30s. In fact he said that the odds are about 40 per cent that southern Alberta will go through a series of droughts just as the prairie provinces did back in the '30s. And central Saskatchewan, there's a 25 per cent chance of that area of the province incurring significant drought.

(11:30)

So why is it important that this change be allowed, Mr. Speaker? Well it's important so that producers have adequate coverage in future years so that they can have something to fall back on. It's an insurance policy. It's not unlike individuals insuring their automobiles or their houses except that it's a very complicated program that people who don't deal with it on a daily basis, you know, certainly wouldn't understand how the program works.

And what I would like to do is just briefly explain in general terms how the program works so that those people who aren't familiar with the crop insurance program may get an understanding why this motion is so important to them.

Coverage is determined by yield times a price, and at the end of the day it works out to . . . when the producer has . . . looks at his total contract, it works out to dollars. And I mean that's what all of us insure for. When we insure our house, we insure to a certain level of coverage expressed in dollar terms, and we insure our automobiles the same.

And this is the same, except that it starts with a yield on each crop, and that yield is determined by a rolling average of your own production history. And so therefore you can see if you incorporate a zero yield in a rolling average, it's going to have a pretty dramatic effect on the amount of . . . on that yield figure.

So when you determine the yield, you times that by the said price for the commodity, and then you end up with your coverage per acre for each crop. And then, of course, they're all added up and that's how you determine the amount, total amount of dollars that you have as far as coverage under your crop insurance program.

And that's a valuable figure to have when farmers are talking to their financial institutions or to their crop input suppliers, cash advance — particularly the spring cash advance needs that information — and of course the higher coverage you have, the more credit is available to you.

And for those farmers who have suffered severe crop losses in the . . . over the past few years, they depend on those type of programs to secure the inputs and the financing needed to put in the following crop. And as I said, those calculations are done for the various crops.

Now if we look . . . I've already said that there is some indication that we may be looking at some pretty severe droughts in the future in Western Canada. And if we look forward to 2003 to see what may be in store for various parts of the province, Mr. Speaker, we see that part of our province, the

southern part of the province and perhaps the northeastern part of the province, have received over the last few months substantial moisture. And at least from a moisture standpoint, the prospects for a reasonable crop next year look fairly good.

But we have a large area of the province — in fact the area that has suffered the worst drought, Mr. Speaker — that have received very little precipitation. I have talked to a number of farmers in the northwestern part of the province and I remember one farmer telling me that the moisture received this past fall was just enough to start a second growth and to delay harvest. In fact, that producer had a number of acres of crop out. But he said there really is no moisture there to start a crop in this upcoming year.

And if we look at what's happening today, Mr. Speaker, it's snowing here in Regina and in parts of the province. And the forecasters tells us that the snow will . . . The part of the province that'll be covered by today's precipitation will be east of the third meridian. Well that basically is the east half of the province, Mr. Speaker. So the area that suffered the worst drought, according to the forecasters, aren't going to be getting the much needed precipitation that we are here, Mr. Speaker. And that is very worrisome to those producers in that area.

So they are very concerned about what a crop insurance program will look like for 2003. This option would be extremely useful to those producers, Mr. Speaker. And I think that we should be . . . this Minister of Agriculture should be incorporating that option.

The Minister of Agriculture asks, well what are our plans. Well this is one small piece of our plan for agriculture, Mr. Speaker. And let's see if the Minister of Agriculture has the courage to adopt a plan that has been suggested by the opposition.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it is the Christmas season, the festive season, the time to be charitable and so on. And when I look across the way at members opposite and I see the Minister of Agriculture sitting there with the huge responsibility he has to develop plans for agriculture and programs that will greatly affect the producers of this province, and I look across at the rest of the members of his caucus, Mr. Speaker, and you know, because it is the Christmas season, you know, I feel somewhat sorry for him. Because really, when he . . . The sole responsibility of agriculture falls on his shoulders and if he would like some help from some of his caucus members — and this is in no way denigrating the other caucus members of his caucus — but really, there is no one over there with any experience or very little knowledge on agriculture.

So the Minister of Agriculture is left there all alone, on his own. And he's responsible for developing programs and policy for that government, and we can see that sometimes it falls far shorter of the mark, Mr. Speaker.

And I think it would be in his best interests and in the best interests of producers in this province if he would accept some advice, some of the expertise. We have a great amount of expertise on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, a great deal of knowledge. I know the Minister of Agriculture's commented on a few occasions that he feels that myself and other members of this caucus are very knowledgeable in agriculture. Well we're

offering in this festive season a helping hand, Mr. Speaker, something to help him so that the producers of this province will benefit.

And, Mr. Speaker, when I look at what's in store in the future and I look at the new agricultural policy framework that the federal Minister of Agriculture has put forward some time ago and the implications that it could have for the producers of this province, and then I look across and I see the Minister of Agriculture, our Minister of Agriculture, who is . . . who has the responsibility to make sure that Saskatchewan is well represented, that Saskatchewan puts forward good plans, and I am fearful, Mr. Speaker. Because I said, the plans that this minister has put forward in the past have fallen short of the mark. We only need to look at the changes to last year's crop insurance program to understand why farmers are fearful of leaving all that responsibility in that minister's hands.

I look at some of the information that's on the Ag Canada Web site dealing with this new agricultural framework, and I see . . . one area there are five pieces, Mr. Speaker, to the new agricultural framework policy. One is food and food safety and food quality.

Another area is the environment, and that area could have some huge implications for Saskatchewan farmers. They're talking about controlling pollution and that sort of thing, which is a good thing, Mr. Speaker. We don't want to be polluting our waters and our air and that sort of thing. But I understand that some of the requirements may be very onerous, and I would make . . . I would feel more comfortable if our Minister of Agriculture and his department were up to speed in that area. And I'm not convinced that they are, Mr. Speaker.

And then we have renewal, science, and innovation, and business risk management. And that . . . if there's one area that concerns me, Mr. Speaker, is that area of business risk management. Because in that area there is a . . . to quote, "a new approach being taken to risk management." And crop insurance is becoming a major portion of business risk management.

And in fact, if I read the information correctly, it is the intent of the federal Minister of Agriculture to boil all the farm programs down into two programs — that being NISA (Net Income Stabilization Account) and crop insurance.

Well if we're only going to have those two programs, Mr. Speaker, we better make sure that those programs that . . . that the people making decisions on those programs get it right because they will have huge implications on the producers of our province. And there is . . . Huge responsibility rests on the shoulders of the Minister of Agriculture to make sure that Saskatchewan is fairly represented, that our Saskatchewan negotiators are knowledgeable, and that they get . . . and that when this whole process is completed, that the programs brought forward are in the best interests of our producers, Mr. Speaker.

And I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced and I don't have the confidence in this Minister of Agriculture that I think . . . and I know farmers of this province are somewhat concerned, Mr. Speaker, and because of the past.

And there's some real concerns for us in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, as legislators. When I look at some of the information in that whole area of business risk management funding, there is . . . the federal government is talking about transition funding, wedge funding which sees, from the information I've been able to look at, sees a declining amount of funding to Saskatchewan.

There's a table in that section, Mr. Speaker, for illustration purposes but I would suspect that those numbers would pretty well reflect what . . . the thinking of the federal government in that. It's entitled, "The transition wedge by province." This wedge funding that the federal government talks about that they're going to put in place from . . . next year until the end of 2006, when by 2007 I understand that the new programs will be fully implemented.

And when I look at that table, I see the wedge funding for Saskatchewan for next year at \$13.1 million. Yet Manitoba is \$22.4 million. Well that's cause for concern, Mr. Speaker. Our agriculture industry in Saskatchewan is a much larger industry, Mr. Speaker, and so why is there fewer dollars?

And then when we look at subsequent years, Mr. Speaker, our funding drops — as do other provinces — but our funding drops greater in relationship to the other provinces, Mr. Speaker.

So those are some questions I think that farmers of this province want some real answers to, Mr. Speaker.

So as I said, this Minister of Agriculture has some huge responsibilities and to this point in time he certainly hasn't been forward, coming forward with the information, Mr. Speaker. In fact I don't recall this minister mentioning that word, wedge, transition wedge funding or explaining that concept to the farming public and to the citizens of this province, and explaining the financial implications that it may have.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, crop insurance does play and it will play in the future a very important part of the whole risk management portfolio that farmers have . . . and program that farmers have to draw on.

And so therefore it's incumbent that farmers know what the programs are. They don't need any more surprises. They don't need any more enhancements of the type that this minister has put forward in the past year. And they need to have some assurances that they are being fairly and competently represented in the negotiations with the federal government, Mr. Speaker.

And at the end of the day what we need in this province is farm programs, and crop insurance being one of them, that work for all farmers. That's one of the things that I hear from a number of my constituents and farmers around this province is that some of them . . . There's probably 25 per cent or so that don't enrol in crop insurance; and asked why — they say the program doesn't work for them. The numbers are too low, it's too expensive in some cases, and that sort of thing.

And what we need to do, if it is the intent of the federal government to have these two farm programs, NISA and crop insurance, then we'd better make sure, Mr. Speaker, that those

programs work for the producers of this province and that they are affordable, Mr. Speaker. And it is that Minister of Agriculture's responsibility to make sure that those programs take that type of form, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to support the motion. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the conclusion of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be moving an amendment, seconded by the member from Regina Coronation Park, that will read this way:

That the words after "Assembly" be deleted and substituted with the following:

that it supports the efforts of Saskatchewan farmers to adopt new practices and technologies that increase their competitiveness and profitability to pursue new market opportunities and diversification initiatives; and further

that this Assembly express appreciation to the staff of the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance for their diligent efforts in serving producers that already processed a record amount, \$750 million claimed payable to this date.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my comments by saying first of all that I very much appreciate some of the words that the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood spoke about today. Because it seems to me that on that side of the House, we do have an individual who does have a fairly strong appreciation of what is happening in rural Saskatchewan.

(11:45)

And from time to time I've had conversations with him, both in the House and outside of the Assembly and during estimates. And he does, I must say, have a better grasp of the rural agricultural issues than anyone else that I've had a conversation with — I must say, Mr. Speaker — on that side of the House. I appreciate his comments, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, on the onset that I recognized . . . Well I should say, Mr. Speaker, that he is by far the strongest member from rural Saskatchewan that provides me with some information from that side of the House. And others, and others he's gradually educating as we're moving along, Mr. Speaker.

But the member opposite asked a minute ago from whom do I get my advice from. And I want to say to the member opposite, that's it's been now the better part of three years that I've — coming on to three years — that I have been the Minister of Agriculture. And I have been meeting at least every five or six weeks with farm leaders and farm groups in the province — actually face to face or through telephone conversations with them — and I've been doing that for the better part now of three years.

And it is those farm leaders that have been helping me craft the kinds of agricultural policy that we have in Saskatchewan today.

I do have also, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan the ability . . . and

have a committee, the Farm Support Review Committee of whom I meet with, Mr. Speaker, also on a regular basis, probably every two months. And it has been that group of men and women who have been assisting me in the development of the farm safety net pieces in this province. And we've been moving that along nicely, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say though, at the onset, Mr. Speaker, that whom I have not been paying a lot of attention to in the development of agricultural policy in Saskatchewan is the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker.

And I want to say to you why it is that I have spent so little time in listening to the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, about agricultural policy. And this motion today is a prime example about why it is that I've been spending so little time.

In Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, today — we've just come out of one of the worst and most devastating droughts that this province has ever had. And, Mr. Speaker, what do they bring to the Assembly today to debate? What do they bring to debate? On agricultural farm policy, Mr. Speaker, and/or rural development, what's their motion?

Their motion is a sector of a farm risk management piece — crop insurance, Mr. Speaker. One little sliver of a farm policy of which they bring to the Assembly to debate after we've had the kind of year that we've had, Mr. Speaker. This is their contribution, Mr. Speaker, to farm policy, Mr. Speaker. This is their contribution to farm policy.

And examine from where this farm policy sliver that they bring to the legislature today to talk about, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you where it comes from, Mr. Speaker. This recommendation to date comes from a 1980 policy. This is where it comes from. It comes from the old guy that . . . (inaudible) . . . say people are forgotten about — Mr. Grant Devine.

This is exactly what he recommended, Mr. Speaker, in farm policy in the '80s. This is his policy, where he said we should take crop insurance, Mr. Speaker, and what we should do is we should adjust it in the way in which they say we should do it today.

And I say to the members opposite, you should examine the Crop Insurance Fund . . .

The Speaker: — I'd just ask the member to continue to speak to the Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker . . . and it's you, Mr. Speaker, who I most like looking at.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that when you examine what happened to the crop insurance program in the '80s, it was exactly this kind of a recommendation that made its way to bankrupt the corporation, Mr. Speaker. It bankrupt the corporation. And it took crop insurance rates to a level of which we've never seen before.

And today this recommendation makes its way onto the floor of the House, and this is their major contribution to farm policy for

the last three and a half years, Mr. Speaker. This is their major contribution: that we should adjust crop insurance, Mr. Speaker. To a way in which it would do what? It would do what?

And it clearly demonstrates how little they understand about farm risk policy. Little they understand. Because to make an adjustment as is recommended here today, Mr. Speaker, you have to do two fundamental things. The first thing you need to do is have a conversation with the reinsurance companies in Canada and across the world because they reinsure this program, Mr. Speaker, to hundreds of millions of dollars. Hundreds of millions of dollars.

And the second discussion, Mr. Speaker, you would have to have is that you would have to have this approved by your national government in order to make adjustments to the crop insurance program in the way in which they suggest today.

And today they bring this to the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and they say, you know what? We're going to help farmers in Canada and Saskatchewan today by adjusting the crop insurance program. By what? By what, Mr. Speaker? And to give them what additional dollars, Mr. Speaker?

This is the Saskatchewan Party's contribution to farm policy in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is their, this is their, this is their policy, Mr. Speaker. And I say to the members opposite, you have 25 members who represent rural Saskatchewan today, or at least you say you represent. You say you represent.

And for the last three years, Mr. Speaker, I have not yet received, not one — except for today — where I actually have something in writing from the Saskatchewan Party that says we should make an adjustment to farm policy. This is the very first piece.

And this recommendation that they bring today, Mr. Speaker, is so far out of touch with reality, so far out of touch because it's not doable, Mr. Speaker. This is not doable in the framework of which we operate today in Canada — never mind Saskatchewan — in Canada. And this is their understanding of what we should be doing, Mr. Speaker.

And I say to the members opposite, why don't you provide some direction? Why don't you provide some direction in terms of what your agenda might be on farm policy? What would be your contribution to farm policy today?

The Speaker: — Just another reminder to the minister in the way he phrases his questions. And I would ask him to phrase his questions through the Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm interested in learning, as we move along over the next while, what the Saskatchewan Party's position will be on agricultural farm policy. And I can tell you what their contributions, Mr. Speaker, have been to date.

And I'm proud to put my record on the line, Mr. Speaker, and it will be tested soon, Mr. Speaker. It will be tested in Saskatchewan today and we will be sure, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan people will know where this government stands on agricultural farm policy and rural development.

And the member from Canora, people will know where he stands. Because the member from Canora-Pelly, Mr. Speaker, has not offered up any ideas or suggestions about farm policy, Mr. Speaker. In fact what I see, the member from Canora stand up from time to time and say, Mr. Speaker, what he says from time to time, Mr. Speaker, is this. He says you should not be investing in rural Saskatchewan, is what the member from Canora-Pelly . . . stands up and he criticizes investment in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

And yet in his backyard he's got hog barns going up and 40 people that are working brand new in his constituency. And does the member from Canora-Pelly ever stand up and say, you know what? This is pretty darn good farm policy that you've got, Mr. Speaker, a pretty darn good farm policy.

And in fact when the member from Canora-Pelly meets with his constituents, what he says is I support the hog industry in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? I support the investments in hog barn development in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

But we hear . . . what's the words that the member from . . . what does the member from Canora-Pelly say when he comes here? He says we shouldn't be investing in rural Saskatchewan. We shouldn't be investing in it.

But you know what, every time that there's investment that's made, Mr. Speaker, every time there's an investment made in his constituency, he shows up at the grand openings and he takes credit at the grand openings and he says what a good thing I've done for rural Saskatchewan today. But that's not what the member from Canora-Pelly says when he's in the House here, Mr. Speaker. He's opposed to investment.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, what the contributions today on farm policy have been by the Saskatchewan Party. What has been their contributions? Well let's take a look at what happened in the year 2000 when we travelled to Ottawa, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of Saskatchewan, the Premier from Manitoba, and representation from the opposition party travelled to Ontario to get a new package for Saskatchewan farmers. And we negotiated, Mr. Speaker, at that point, an additional \$300 million for Saskatchewan producers in 1999.

And we weren't home, Mr. Speaker, 10 minutes we weren't home, and members of the Saskatchewan Party were in front of the media saying that, you know what, we should keep this old AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program. We should keep this AIDA program and we should convert it to a new language. And the member from Saltcoats was at that meeting, and the member from Kindersley was at that meeting in Ottawa, and they couldn't wait to get back, Mr. Speaker, and endorse that AIDA program that we had in Saskatchewan.

That's been the contribution of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, on risk management — to adopt the AIDA, CFIP (Canadian Farm Income Program) program. And we had it for two and a half years and every day they'd stand up in their places and say we should get rid of this thing. But they supported it, Mr. Speaker, on every occasion that they had.

And then we have the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Well what did he hand off to Saskatchewan farmers, Mr. Speaker? What did he hand off? Well he handed off a \$300 million Crow rate payment that disappeared, Mr. Speaker. The member of the opposition hands that off.

At that point, Mr. Speaker, he was representative of the Canadian Alliance Party, supporting Mr. Stockwell Day, Mr. Stockwell Day in his wonderful leadership campaign. And you know what happened to Mr. Stockwell Day, Mr. Speaker. And what happened to Mr. Stockwell Day is exactly what's going to happen to the member from Rosetown, Rosetown Elrose in the next federal . . . provincial election. We know what will happen to him. The residents of Saskatchewan will do to him what they did to him in the Saskatchewan election, Mr. Speaker, federally. That's what will happen to him.

But that's been the Leader of the Opposition's contribution to Saskatchewan — the Crow rate, Mr. Speaker. Where he speaks in favour of the Crow rate, Mr. Speaker, and says we should do away with the Crow, costing Saskatchewan farmers \$300 million is what it did, Mr. Speaker.

And today the member opposite, you know, spouts from his chair, from Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and says, I appreciate the work of my leader. I appreciate the work of my leader, where he takes \$300 million out of the jeans of Saskatchewan farmers, Mr. Speaker. And the member from Kindersley who's supposed to have the agricultural plan in his back pocket, Mr. Speaker, because I think Mr. Boyd when he left took it with him. And maybe the member from Kindersley has it today because he said he had the plan.

And, Mr. Speaker, what we have today is we have a party opposite who say they represent rural Saskatchewan, and both on AIDA and CFIP and now on the Crow have cost Saskatchewan farmers money, is two examples, Mr. Speaker.

And then, Mr. Speaker, I heard the member in August from Watrous stand up and say or publicly say on the radio waves — you know what? — the minister from Saskatchewan should go to Ottawa and he should sign the agreement. He should sign the APF agreement, Mr. Speaker.

And I said, Mr. Speaker, and have been saying all along that we're not signing the agricultural policy framework, Mr. Speaker, until we can get a better adjustment for Saskatchewan farmers. And that's been the position of my farm groups, Mr. Speaker, whom I meet with every couple of weeks. That's been the position of the Farm Safety Net Review Committee from Saskatchewan. That's been the position of the western provinces, Mr. Speaker, that we shouldn't be signing the agreement.

But what was the member from Watrous and their agricultural critic say? Saskatchewan should sign the agreement, Mr. Speaker.

Well we didn't sign the agreement, Mr. Speaker. And by not signing the agreement, we today have the largest share of the new agricultural formula in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We have it today. And that leadership on farm policy has been provided by this minister and my farm groups and this Premier.

And the member opposite from Watrous and the Saskatchewan Party have gotten in the way of that conversation on every occasion and nearly again sold out Saskatchewan farmers to the tune of \$600 million, Mr. Speaker — almost sold Saskatchewan farmers out again. And that's how little they understand about agricultural farm policy, Mr. Speaker. That's how little they understand.

And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I hear on a regular basis on that side of the House, their members stand up and say, you know what, we need to move away from the Canadian Wheat Board in this province. What we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is we have to go to a dual marketing system here in Saskatchewan, because you know what — that's what's going to work here in Canada for us in the future.

And just recently . . . And that's the position of Mr. Ralph Klein and that's the position of the old Stockwell Day before, Mr. Speaker. And this is the same position of this Saskatchewan Party because they're all of the same cloth, Mr. Speaker. They're all of the same cloth.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, that the contributions that the Saskatchewan Party has provided to date to Saskatchewan farmers and Saskatchewan producers has been a dismal, dismal record. And I'll say to you, Mr. Speaker, that Saskatchewan producers, Saskatchewan farmers, the Saskatchewan rural community understands what the Saskatchewan Party has done for rural Saskatchewan producers and farmers. They've contributed zero, Mr. Speaker — zero — to the development of agricultural policy.

And come the next vote, Mr. Speaker, the next federal vote, we're going to see what will happen in rural Saskatchewan, where you're going to see on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker, a disappearance of at least a back row and part of the second row because those are the people, Mr. Speaker, who say they represent rural Saskatchewan and they have no idea about what rural Saskatchewan is about. They have no idea about what farm policy is about and they're totally disengaged from the kinds of things, Mr. Speaker, that are happening in rural Saskatchewan today.

(12:00)

And I look forward to the debate in the future, Mr. Speaker, as we move and work towards a better and stronger Saskatchewan safety net program.

And I say, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this government's record on agriculture and farm policy — proud of it, Mr. Speaker. And I say this from this perspective, Mr. Speaker, from this perspective. We delivered, Mr. Speaker, we delivered for Saskatchewan farmers in 1999 \$600 million for Saskatchewan farmers last year and we delivered this year for Saskatchewan farmers an additional . . . or for Canadian farmers — sorry, Mr. Speaker — for Canadian farmers, we delivered \$600 million last year and we're delivering \$600 million for Canadian farmers next year because we understand what needs to happen in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. We understand it.

And we're building a stronger rural Saskatchewan and farm policy because we are working with Saskatchewan farmers and

producers to achieve that, Mr. Speaker.

And what did we say, Mr. Speaker, when we said that we're interested in making sure that we have a better safety net, risk management program? We said that we need to show, Mr. Speaker . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And the member from Indian Head-Milestone wants to know how the polling in Saskatchewan is doing.

The member from Rosetown . . . the member from Indian Head-Milestone, Mr. Speaker, knows how the polling in Saskatchewan is doing. Mr. Speaker, the polling in rural . . . the polling in Saskatchewan is saying that their leader is behind their party by at least 22 points. That's what the polling is saying, Mr. Speaker, and the polling is saying that our Premier is ahead of their opposition leader by better than 25 points. That's what the polling is saying, Mr. Speaker.

And why is the polling saying that, Mr. Speaker? Because of the rural policy. Because of the rural policy. Because you know that these people here are totally disconnected, Mr. Speaker, from what's happening in rural Saskatchewan today. And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when we start to see, if we ever do, any of the rural policy by the opposition party, which we've not seen yet, Mr. Speaker, in the last several years, it will be a delight, Mr. Speaker.

This speech, Mr. Speaker . . . this session, Mr. Speaker, was to be about three major issues. This debate, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I would just remind the member of the discussion on the motion before us, which has to deal with crop insurance for the 2002 crop year. And I would ask him to keep his remarks relevant to the motion at hand.

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Well, Mr. Speaker, what I'm . . . what we're proposing on the crop insurance file, Mr. Speaker, is that we're going to have two major programs in Canada, two for Saskatchewan. We're going to have an enhanced crop insurance program, and we're going to have nationally a new NISA program.

And we're . . . we've been advocating, Mr. Speaker, that we see enrichments to the 1.1 billion which I don't believe that the federal government will be adding, but we're saying we should have additional money there. And we'll be working towards enhancing both of those programs.

We've already made a contribution on the transition program. We're leading the country, Mr. Speaker, on transition. Clearly we're leading the country on our contributions per capita to Saskatchewan agriculture and that will continue to be our position.

And I want to close my comments, Mr. Speaker, by saying this. That as we move into a new year, Mr. Speaker, and as we move into a new . . . a new era in terms of what we're doing in agriculture, and in Canada, this new policy nationally, Mr. Speaker, will be the very first time that you've seen a strong agricultural policy in Canada. The very first one.

And we've been working hard over the last couple of years, and I've been very pleased to be part of a national strategy, a

national program. And I say to the members opposite that it would be good some day . . . over the next six or eight months, it would be good to see where you really stand because, Mr. Speaker, we have a plan, an integrated plan on agricultural policy; we have an integrated plan on rural development; and, Mr. Speaker, they have a slogan only. They have a slogan, Mr. Speaker, and we have a plan.

And so I'm not going to be supporting the resolution, Mr. Speaker, and my motion would be this. My motion, seconded . . . the motion from Yorkton . . . seconded by the member from Regina Coronation Park:

. . . after the words "Assembly" be deleted and substituted with the following:

that it supports the efforts of Saskatchewan farmers to adopt new practices and technologies that increase their competitiveness and profitability to pursue new market opportunities and diversification initiatives; and further

that this Assembly express appreciation to the staff of Saskatchewan Crop Insurance for their diligent efforts in serving producers by already processing a record amount of 730 million in claim payments to this date.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues.

It's my pleasure to follow the Hon. Minister of Agriculture as he so eloquently outlined safety net programs and talked about crop insurance and the importance of crop insurance to Saskatchewan farmers.

And, Mr. Speaker, I intend to not have extended comments, but there are a number of things that I wish to get on the record on this issue, not the least of which is I'm proud to have this opportunity to talk a little bit about crop insurance — a little bit about its history, its proud past, its very proud right now, and the proud future that we see for crop insurance.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't express some regret that the opposition came with a motion to tinker a little bit with crop insurance, and that was the best that came out of it.

I'm very pleased to support the amendment to the motion and, of course, I'm very pleased with the job that crop insurance does for farm families day in and day out.

I want to talk, Mr. Speaker, a little bit about crop insurance. And one of the comments that I've heard from some farmers that I know — and I've asked some other, some farmers about — and the phrase that keeps coming back to me is, well crop insurance doesn't pay. And it's true.

It depends a lot on what your view of crop insurance is. Crop insurance is — in my view and in fact I heard it expressed by I think by the member for Last Mountain-Touchwood — crop insurance, I think the analogy was, is similar to fire insurance or vehicle insurance. I'm not trying to put words in the member opposite's mouth but that's how I see an insurance scheme, is a

scheme that is set up to replace hard costs — in this case, the hard cost of seed, fuel, fertilizer, chemicals, that sort of thing if you have a crop failure.

There are other programs designed to be a top-up of income but crop insurance is set out to replace your hard and fixed costs.

Crop insurance is actuarially certified. It's a federal-provincial program and it's got a formula that others have gone into earlier and I don't want to take the limited time I have to deal with the formula on average yields and so on.

I want to point out a little bit, Mr. Speaker, about the history of crop insurance which started in 1961, a year that I actually remember very, very well growing up on a farm. I remember it for it being incredibly dry. I remember 1961 as a year of virtual crop failure and that was the year that crop insurance was set up under the forerunner to the New Democratic Party, the CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation), 1961. Look at the history of it.

In that time, Mr. Speaker, of crop insurance being set up, farmers paid 80 per cent of the premium and after six years that went to 75 per cent of the premium for crop insurance paid by farmers. And then from 1973 to '96 it was 50 per cent. It's interesting; 1973 was Al Blakeney's New Democrats where we lowered the premium. And we continued to improve the situation right up until today. Farmers pay 37 per cent of the premium for crop insurance.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment deals with Saskatchewan farmers adopting to new technologies, new practices, increasing their competitiveness and their profitability. I could talk about many things that farmers have done over the years from the development of the Noble blade in the '30s as a soil conservation member, rod weeders in the '50s and '60s, air seeders in the late '80s and into the '90s. I could talk about farmers developing zero tilling and direct seeding, various other things. There's much that we could do.

Mr. Speaker, the Ag critic opposite says, why don't you talk about the '90s. Well I'm going to talk a little bit about the '90s, then. In 1997, crop insurance premium was reduced from where farmers paid not 50 per cent, but down to 42 per cent. 1998-99, it was again reduced so farmers paid 39 per cent. In 2000-2001, it was again reduced where farmers paid 30 per cent of the premium.

This is in the '90s that you just asked for. Be careful what you ask for, member opposite, because you . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. Order. Order. I would request the member for Regina Coronation Park to address all of his comments in this legislature through the Chair.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, as I near the conclusion of my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out one thing to you and to . . . through you to everyone. And that is that day in and day out, we're working and we're committed to making crop insurance work better and better and better. That's the history of government members, it's a history on this side of the Chamber. We're very, very proud of what's happened in crop insurance.

Members opposite, Mr. Speaker, will snipe at crop insurance. They'll complain that it's somehow a deficient program while we work day in and day out to make it better. I've got many more things that I'd like to say about it, but I think sufficient to say, Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of crop insurance. We're very proud of the future. We're very proud of the staff at Crop Insurance for the terrific job they've done in a very, very trying year. They've done a terrific job of getting money into the hands of the producers, the people that it's set up for.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to support the amendment to this very important motion.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member from Regina Coronation Park — and I emphasize, Regina Coronation Park — for his eloquent defence of the 1960s crop insurance program, Mr. Speaker. It would seem that the speaker wants us to go back to farming with horse and buggies, Mr. Speaker, and wishes to emphasize the benefits of the buggy whip and the rod weeder.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we've moved a little bit beyond that in the last few years. Farmers across this province have — in spite of this NDP government — diversified and made their farms as profitable as possible with the . . . trying to circumvent the interferences of this government and this government's complete lack of support for agriculture, Mr. Speaker.

And I think the election results in the last election in 1999 clearly outlined the support that Saskatchewan agriculture had, or perhaps I should say the contempt that Saskatchewan agriculture had for the NDP's policies and their implementation.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(12:15)

Mr. D'Autremont: — The government went from a fairly strong rural caucus, Mr. Speaker, to two members that could even at the outside be classified as rural members. One of those represents the city of Yorkton, Mr. Speaker, and the other member represents a northern fringe riding that is more attuned to forestry than it is to production crops of agriculture, Mr. Speaker, and that would be Meadow Lake. That is the extent, Mr. Speaker. That was the condemnation that rural Saskatchewan gave to this government and its agriculture policies.

The member praises, Mr. Speaker, the 1961 crop insurance program but fails to mention that they cut spot loss hail this year, they cut the variable price option, Mr. Speaker. In reducing the premiums the member forgot to mention they also reduced the coverage. The premium could go down to zero, Mr. Speaker, and still have no value if the coverage is also zero.

So, Mr. Speaker, as my leader said earlier, there may be a snowstorm outside but the largest snowstorm is happening from the other side as they try to pull the wool over the eyes of rural

Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it's time that we have this vote so that the people of Saskatchewan can understand exactly that this government has no concern for rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Amendment agreed to on division.

Motion as amended agreed to on division.

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — All right. Order, please. Order. I would . . . Order, please. Order, please.

I would like to bring to the members' attention that earlier this day I tabled the first annual report of the Saskatchewan legislative internship program for the year 2002. It was delivered by the academic director for the program, Dr. Gordon Barnhart.

I would like to advise the Assembly that Her Honour is here for Royal Assent.

ROYAL ASSENT

At 12:22 Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber, took her seat upon the throne, and gave Royal Assent to the following Bills:

- Bill No. 82 - The Representation Act, 2002
- Bill No. 83 - The IPSCO Inc. and United Steelworkers of America, Local 5890, Collective Bargaining Agreement Act, 2002
- Bill No. 304 - The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 2002

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

Her Honour retired from the Chamber at 12:25.

MOTIONS

House Adjournment

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would, on the conclusion of my remarks, intend to move an adjournment motion. And because I made a rather lengthy speech on this motion when . . . just a few short months ago, I promise the House that I'm going to be very brief today.

And I know we're all anxious to get home to our families. We've got a little bit of weather happening as is wont to happen in Saskatchewan on occasion. And it's great to see the snow because we sure can use the moisture.

I want to say thank you to a number of people who helped this session run and help us function as members of the legislature. And so I want to thank all the Legislative Building and the Legislative Assembly staff for the hard work that they do, not only during session but throughout the year.

And I want to thank, on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House, and I think on all of our behalves, our constituency assistants, the caucus office staff, the ministerial staff, the Executive Council staff, for their hard work during this rather lengthy eight-day session.

I'd also like to thank all the members of the Assembly who work so hard and were very dedicated to their constituencies and to this place, and for the debate that took place during the last eight days here in the Legislative Building.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think the most important part of the remarks that I want to make today. I want to take this opportunity to wish you, and all members of the Legislative Assembly and their staffs, a very Merry Christmas, a safe and a happy holiday.

And I just want to close by recognizing the untimely passing of our former colleague Rudi Peters, because I really think it does help us to reflect on what this season is all about, and the importance of our family and our friends.

And I want to encourage all members to go home, spend a little time relaxing, and getting to visit with their neighbours and with their families.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will move, seconded by the member from Cannington:

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

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to join with the Government House Leader in wishing seasons greetings, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year to all the members, the staff of both the caucuses and of the Legislative Assembly. And as well, Mr. Speaker, to wish Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and a safe holiday to everyone across Saskatchewan. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too am pleased to have this opportunity on behalf of myself and David Karwacki to wish all my colleagues in this House, the staff, and indeed the people of Saskatchewan the very best of the holiday season. Now that the session is over, this indeed can become a season of peace and joy and goodwill.

And I wish all the very best I say to my colleagues and to all the people of Saskatchewan that this will be a time, as the Government House Leader said, of gratitude and reflection, and warmth and joy and love for each and every one of us as we gather with friends and family and remember all the blessings we have in this life. And I wish all the very best of the season to each and every one of you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lautermilch: — Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Before putting the motion I would also like to thank all members for their participation in the session, and wish everybody a very, very Merry Christmas and a happy holiday. It has been moved by the Government House Leader that this House now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

The Assembly adjourned at 12:30.