

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

November 27, 1985

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

HON. MR. ROUSSEAU: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, Miss Sandra Keenan, who is a Rotary exchange student from South Island, New Zealand, who is seated in the Speaker's gallery. Sandra has been a student at Campbell Collegiate, which is in my constituency, since January of 1985. Her exchange program will end in January of 1986, at which time she will return to New Zealand. Sandra's exchange program has been sponsored by the Regina Eastview Rotary Club, and she is accompanied today by Mrs. Jessie Carlson. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to wish them both an informative and enjoyable visit to the legislature, and I would ask all members to join me in welcoming them here today.

HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

HON. MR. MAXWELL: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you, and through you to the members of the Assembly, a young lady seated in your gallery, sir. Her name is Dorothee Fisher-Appelt and she's an exchange student from Germany. She's been with my family for the last three months. She's been a lovely addition to my family, I may say, and we hope you enjoyed yourself, Dorothee. Thank you.

HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Natural Gas Rates

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Mr. Speaker, I direct the question to the Deputy Premier and the minister in charge of the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, and it deals with the provincial cabinet's decision to once again overrule the Public Utilities Review Commission by dictating that everyone's SPC rates will go up to pay for the 1982 election promise to extend natural gas service to remote rural areas. Since this is the second time in a year that the cabinet has overruled the Public Utilities Review Commission on a crucial decision, can the minister explain why the Saskatchewan taxpayers are spending more than \$2 million a year to keep PURC in business, when your cabinet continues to second guess it on key issues?

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that it's the government's job to set the policy, or the mandate of Sask Power, and it's PURC's job to see that the rules within that mandate, or whatever, are complied with. And the mandate of Sask Power, as we see it, or one of them, is that they should provide natural gas to the largest number of people in our agricultural community as possible. Not much different, I think, than when in the '40's and '50s rural electrification took place. This is rural gasification, if you like, and we think it's right and proper that it should be included in the rate base.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell the House and SPC customers just how much of the shortfall of the cost of the natural gas rural electrification program is going to have to be borne by increases in rates borne by all customers. Is the shortfall of the order of \$100 million or \$200 million of capital which will not be carried by the specific customers who are served, and accordingly whose cost must be borne by all the persons who take natural gas service? So you have a figure indicating the dead capital — if one may put it that way — the capital that has to be carried by a surcharge on general rates?

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — Mr. Speaker, I don't have it at my fingertips, obviously, but I'm told that Saskatchewan Power Corporation will be coming before the committee on Crown corporations, I think some time next week, at which time I would invite the Leader of the Opposition to ask that question.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister give any indication of what the likely effect of the cabinet decision will be on the increase in natural gas rates which the power corporation will have to request from PURC? We all noted with some concern the public announcements of two months ago saying that SPC would likely be seeking a 17 per cent rate increase in electrical rates. Can you now tell us what the rate increase for gas rates will be, which will be sought by SPC?

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — No — the short answer. And your 17 per cent of several months ago was based purely on speculation. There will be an application going before PURC in due course, at which time all of that will be public. And I might add at that time the hon. member opposite will have an opportunity to intervene at PURC and express his case before that particular organization.

Land Titles Office Closure

MR. SVEINSON: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister in charge of the Public Service Commission. As he is well aware, I'm sure, and as are other members of the legislature, the Land Titles office in Regina and throughout the province, in fact, the offices throughout the province have been closed for approximately a month. The office in Regina hasn't transacted a title transfer since the 21st of October because of a protracted strike between SGEU and their employer who sits across the House.

I was wondering, for those who are suffering because of the inability of the title to be transferred, if the minister has any solutions in the short term for those people who are suffering, who include home buyers, home sellers, purchasers of farm land, even lawyers and in fact realtors who don't collect any income. In fact, moneys aren't exchanged until the transfer is complete at the Land Titles office. So could you please enlighten these people, Mr. Minister, as to the solutions your government may have to that problem.

HON. MR. MCLEOD: — Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all the hon. member's question is related to Land Titles, but certainly with the current job action that is taking place with the SGEU, there are inconveniences certainly being experienced by various sectors around the province. All we can say, as we have said in a public way in the newspaper and so on, is that it's unfortunate.

All the Public Service Commission or the government can do is basically apologize to the public of Saskatchewan for the inconvenience which they suffer. Collective bargaining is going on. WE believe that we have a fair and reasonable offer on the table. And I guess, Mr. Speaker, that's all I can really add at this point, is just to reiterate that we believe there is a fair and reasonable offer on the table, and express the hope that the SGEU will come back to the table and carry on in that process, and hopefully and agreement can be reached as soon as possible.

MR. SVEINSON: — Supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is the minister saying that it's beyond his ability to possibility use management people or other people who could be trained on a temporary basis to in fact carry on the day-to-day business of the Land Titles office? And if that's so, I don't understand why these people can't be trained on a short-term basis until the strike has been ended.

HON. MR. MCLEOD: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I have given the response as it relates to the wider issue of the SGEU strike action. As it relates to the individual departments, and how the contingency plans, if you will, or how the management will carry on the day-to-day workings of the departments, that would be a question better directed, I would think, to the department involved, and in this case, the Department of Justice. If the member would like, I suppose it would be in order for the Minister of Justice to respond as it relates to the departmental day-to-day business.

HON. MR. LANE: — Well the management has, Mr. Speaker, done some of the preliminary registration of documents. It goes without saying that those who understand the operation of the Land Titles recognize the skills and abilities of the employees. It's not a skill that one learns in a very short period of time. It's a complex procedure. The employees are well-trained and you do not train people to take over their duties in a very short period of time.

We have, as I say, attempted to improve the registration and I gather the registration of documents coming in is being caught up, but of course the . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, the information I have, Mr. Speaker, is that it is, in fact, being caught up. But needless to say, we have in the Land Titles some of the most highly skilled people in government. It's a very precise job that they are undertaking. They must be extremely careful as to the accuracy of titles and the accuracy of information, and it's not the type of skill that can be given to anyone to take over on a short term.

MR. SVEINSON: — Well I agree, Mr. Minister, that it's not the type of skill you can learn overnight. I think if you look historically at the negotiations between you and your union, the Land Titles office has been used consistently as a tool by the union, certainly, to draw their point to the attention of the public.

I think, with respect to your own office, anticipating this type of problem may in fact in the future require training of people who can deal with it during a protracted strike. With this consideration, would your department consider this type of action?

HON. MR. LANE: — When there's not a strike, I think that the Land Titles employees are among the most productive, and I don't think it would do much for morale if we are to expand that into management. I realize that those affected by the use of the land titles system are in many cases seriously affected, but it is a pressure point that has been chosen by the union involved. We are comfortable as a government, as the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission has indicated, that the offer we have made to the union is fair, that it's reasonable, and I hope that most members of the union would see that.

Nursing Home Rates

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Health, and it deals with an issue that affects about 9,000 senior citizens in the province of Saskatchewan. It's the 24 per cent increase that seniors and nursing homes have seen since your government came into power. AS recently as November 1st of this year, another increase was set in place, an increase that brought the charge up from 390, which it was when you took over, to \$485 per month.

Now I say to you, Mr. Minister, at a time when you're talking about restraint, when government employees are being told zero per cent, or other employees are being told zero per cent, how is it that seniors who are flat on their back in nursing homes are being asked to pay an extra 24 per cent increase in nursing home rates at this time?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think, in the hon. member's question, he's a bit confused. He says 24 per cent over a period of time, and then he ends his question by saying, how are they asked to give an additional 24 per cent now? So I think there's some ambiguity in his questioning.

But, Mr. Speaker, as you know, and the members opposite, when we came in, we saw that the seniors in this province had a disposable income of \$65 previously under the administration that we replaced in '82. We didn't think that was a sufficient amount of disposable income. We pegged it at \$100, and it goes up proportionately, quarterly — the charge for their keep within the home and also their disposable income.

I should add above that, in the last year my colleague, the Minister of Social Services, who can explain those increases — I believe it was two increases of \$25 each, a precedent in the province of Saskatchewan — I think it is an understatement for anyone to think that this side of the House is not

looking after the concerns of our senior citizens.

HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Speaker, a supplement to the minister. At a time when this government has announced oil-royalty cuts of about \$300 million a year for oil companies, has announced for land speculators a cut in taxes of \$500,000 a year, can you explain to us just how, Mr. Minister, at a time when you're talking about giving away money to corporations and oil companies, you expect senior citizens to pay an extra \$855,000 per month, or about \$10 million a year if you multiply the increase that you have put in place on the 9,000 seniors in nursing homes?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess I have to explain again that it goes up quarterly as the old age security and the supplement goes up. It's a portion of that. The seniors are notified in advance. The nursing homes are notified. And, as I say, if you look at significant amounts of money put in the hands of people, I think someone who came from \$65 disposable income to in excess of \$150 disposable income in the last three years is really putting money in the hands of seniors.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Well, a supplement to the minister. If you can explain how oil companies are allowed \$300 million in tax cuts, and you're saying at the same time 24 per cent increase in payments for senior citizens in nursing homes, that that's just or fair; you can continue to do that. But my question to you, Mr. Minister, is this: in the city of Regina at the present time we have about 1,000 seniors waiting for nursing home beds, 250 of them urgent. Can you explain to me how many nursing home beds you intend to open this year to solve that waiting list of about 1,000 people?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Well, going back to the amount of disposable income, I'd just like to remind you and this House, it was the person questioning me that pegged the disposable income for people in this province, seniors, at \$65. It was the man asking the questions that did that when he had the portfolio of Social Services.

As far as the construction of nursing home beds in the province of Saskatchewan, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in this Assembly knows, that perhaps — well, I won't say perhaps — I am positive that the most mammoth project of special care home bed construction ever undertaken in this province, and perhaps in any province, on a per capita basis, because we lead on beds per capita basis in North America, was undertaken by this government — 1600 beds in 60 communities across Saskatchewan. Some of those beds are going into Regina. There were 12, for people who were hard to handle, opened at the Lutheran Home in the last year. Santa Maria is coming on track, and so is the Salvation Army in the coming year. So, certainly I would compare this to a moratorium any time, any place, anywhere. I think this is a record that every member on this side of the House can stand proud on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. LINGENFELTER: — The minister indicates that he is opening 12 beds in Regina to solve the waiting list of 1,000, and several beds are going to be opened in the year coming, about 30, and at that rate you will take 33 years to solve the problem of the 1,000 on the waiting list at the present time. But I'm sorry to say, Mr. Minister, those people who are urgently needing a nursing home bed aren't going to be able to wait that long.

Mr. Speaker: — Order, please. The member rose on a supplementary and is literally making a speech. If you have a supplementary, I would like you to get on with that supplementary.

MR. LINGENFELTER: — The supplementary to the minister is: when are you going to announce that you're going to solve the problem of the 1,00 people who are waiting for nursing home beds in the city of Regina at a time when you're making massive tax relief available for oil companies and speculators in Regina? When are the senior citizens waiting for nursing home beds going to be given the same relief?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Mr. Speaker, I can tell by the type of question coming from the member opposite just how out of tune he is with the needs of people, the senior citizens of the province. Mr. Speaker, let me indicate to you that from consultation meetings I've had with over 1,200 people in Saskatchewan in the last two or three months, one of the things that came across very, very strong, if we're going to meet the needs, if we're going to meet the needs of senior citizens in Regina and in other areas of Saskatchewan, one of the most important things that we can do is to improve and beef up the home care program in this province.

To that extent, at the home care annual meeting in Saskatoon last week, I put forth a white paper for discussion by the people of this province on the directions of home care. As I said previously, we lead the nation in special care home beds. We have made a solid commitment of 1,600 beds in special care homes. But if we're going to meet the needs of these people, to keep them in their homes where they would like to be, then home care is one of the answers, and that is certainly one that we're addressing now. And we will have — we will have the best home care province, the best home care service in the Dominion of Canada.

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Hearing the minister, and listening to the number of people who come to me about trying to get a place in a nursing home, will the minister state simply: how many nursing home beds have been opened in Regina — new nursing home beds — have been opened in Regina since 1982? Since May of 1982? Not never, never, which are going to be. How many beds have been opened?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Well I don't think something in the next year of two is Never Never Land. He may think so. But I would like to be able to go back in time to '75 when the moratorium was on, when the man asking me the question was the premier of the province — the premier of the province of Saskatchewan — a man who now has a great concern for senior citizens, who allowed his ministers — who allowed his ministers to place a moratorium on construction of nursing home beds. I don't think that was in the best needs of the people of Saskatchewan.

And I've told you, Mr. Speaker, and members opposite, that we've come forward with — and I'm sure you cannot dispute that — with the largest construction program of nursing home beds ever in the history of this province, ever in the history. And I challenge you to dispute that.

As far as this question: how many were opened in Regina in the last year? There were 12 opened at the Lutheran Home for hard-to-manage people. There are 76 on stream coming in at Santa Maria and also at the Salvation Army. That's part of the 1,600 that will be built around this province.

Furthermore, furthermore, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has come into place in Regina is an assessment and placement co-ordinating committee.

Let me explain, Mr. Speaker, how this helps the citizens of this province, because anyone coming to be placed in Regina comes before the same assessment. They don't run from home to home as they had to in the days before, as they had to go from home to home and waiting list to waiting list. They come to one place where their needs are assessed, and they're advised as to whether it's better to have home care services, or special-care home placement, or, in some cases, placement in an acute care hospital, and then removal and home care supporting.

That is serving the needs of senior citizens in this province, right here in Saskatchewan, and we have those kind of programs in almost every home care jurisdiction, and certainly it is operating well in the city of Regina.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

HON. MR. BLAKENEY: — Further supplementary, Mr. Speaker. Do I take it from your answer that

the number of nursing home beds opened in Regina in the last three years and six months is 12?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Well I've said three times, but I guess it's hard to get the message across, that there were 12 open at the Lutheran Home for hard- to- manage people, people who through no fault of their own, Mr. Speaker, suffered from such things as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, very hard-to-manage people. Twelve of those beds have been placed in Lutheran Home.

On the drawing board, the funds are being raised in place, are for two additions, and my memory tells me 36 and 30, which is 76 beds coming on stream in the next couple of years here with Santa Maria and with the Salvation Army.

MR. SHILLINGTON: — Mr. Minister, I want to ask you whether or not you have revised the document that your government tabled in this House. Last year when you announced this mammoth, first-class, biggest-ever, world-wide nursing home program, you indicated — you tabled the document in the House — you indicated that over the next five years you were going to build 30 beds in Regina. You now say that you are going to meet the needs of Regina. So I take it from that that you have revised that figure and you're going to be now building more than 30? Unless, Mr. Minister, you're capable of rewriting the rules of mathematics, 30 nursing beds will not meet the needs of 1,000 patients. I ask you, Mr. Minister, is the document you filed last year in the House still operative? If it isn't, what's your figure now?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Mr. Speaker, of course I think what is becoming evident today is that we are playing catch-up on the lack of forward planning by the previous administration. Be that as it may — Mr. Speaker, the beds that were built in Regina are the Salvation Army and Santa Maria. My memory today tells me that's approximately 76, so I don't know where he gets the 30 idea. Coupled with this, there is a nursing home into Lumsden; there are extra beds going into Fort Qu'Appelle. For some of the areas where people were previously coming to Regina, we'll be servicing those areas also.

Survey of Saskatchewan Nurses

MR. TCHORZEWSKI: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to address a question to the Minister of Health as well, and I want to move to another aspect of health care which, Mr. Minister, your government has failed to recognize as a very serious problem, and that is the extremely inadequate staffing of the health care system due to inadequate provincial funding.

I want to ask the minister aware that a recent survey of Saskatchewan nurses saw 71 per cent of them agree that staff levels at their hospital or nursing home were not adequate to provide a professional level of patient care and in fact, that nearly half of the nurses surveyed felt that the lack of staff had forced them to deal with medical situations for which they had not been adequately trained? Is the minister aware of those figures, and what has he done to improve the staffing levels at Saskatchewan hospitals and nursing homes?

HON. MR. TAYLOR: — Thank you very much for the question. I think that's a sincere question and certainly I'm aware of the situation expressed by the people in SUN, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. To that extent I have a meeting set up with Ms. June Blau in the very near future to discuss these points.

But I want to, Mr. Speaker, just indicate, and I think the questioner would realize this, that one of the reasons that there were shortages of nurses in the hospitals in Saskatchewan was that in 1974, I believe it was, the year the people opposite — '76 — were once involved with the purchase of potash mines, they saw it fit to delete 400 positions from the hospitals of Saskatchewan. Since coming into office we have added 478 positions from the hospitals of Saskatchewan. So I think, again, it's a matter of playing some catch-up ball, but as the member said, am I aware that the nurses are concerned? Yes, we are aware. Secondly, we're going to be meeting with them to discuss this.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 116 — An Act respecting the Transfer of Revenues from Oil Resources to Farmers in the form of Refunds in respect of Fuel Costs

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. member, I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Transfer of Revenues from Oil Resources to Farmers in the form of Refunds in respect of Fuel Costs.

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

Bill No. 117 — An Act to amend the Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan Act

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. member I move first reading of a Bill to amend the Agricultural Credit Corporation of Saskatchewan Act.

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

Bill No. 118 — An Act to assist New Grade Energy Inc. establishing a Heavy Oil Upgrader in Saskatchewan

HON. MR. SCHOENHALS: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to assist NewGrade Energy Incorporated in establishing a Heavy Oil Upgrader in Saskatchewan.

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

Bill No. 119 — An Act respecting Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Corporation

HON. MR. SCHOENHALS: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill respecting the Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Corporation.

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

Bill No. 120 — An Act to amend The Municipal Employees' Superannuation Act

HON. MR. DOMOTOR: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend the Municipal Employees' Superannuation Act.

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

Bill No. 121 — An Act to amend The Heritage Fund (Saskatchewan) Act, No. 2

HON. MR. SCHOENHALS: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Heritage Fund (Saskatchewan) Act, No. 2.

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

Bill No. 122 — An Act to amend the Heritage Fund (Saskatchewan) Act, No. 3

HON. MR. BERNTSON: — Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of a Bill to amend The Heritage Fund (Saskatchewan) Act, No. 3.

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

PRIORITY OF DEBATE

Farm Crisis

MR. ENGEL: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day, I rise pursuant to rule 17 to seek leave to move that the Assembly give priority debate to a definite matter of urgent public importance is this, Mr. Speaker: Saskatchewan farmers are faced with a crisis, and the governments of Saskatchewan and Canada have the responsibility to resolve that crisis. They have the opportunity to do so at the first minister's conference commencing tomorrow, This Assembly should express their views on this matter. Pursuant to rule 17, I therefore seek leave, Mr. Speaker, to move:

That this Assembly recognize the grave agricultural crisis facing the farmers of Saskatchewan, the responsibility of the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan to address and resolve that crisis, and that this Assembly give priority of debate to a motion dealing specifically with this urgent matter of public importance.

I so move, seconded by my colleague from Shaunavon.

MR. SPEAKER: — The question under rule 17 required two hours notice, and the notice was received in time today. The decision whether or not to proceed with the motion rests with the House.

Leave granted.

MR. ENGEL: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of my motion that the Assembly give priority of debate on an urgent public importance. Members have heard the motion simply put. The matter is this: Saskatchewan family farmers are facing a crisis. Together with the high input costs and the low commodity prices and the need for long-term stability has caused that crisis.

To just indicate briefly, Mr. Speaker, how serious this crisis is, I asked the Farm Credit Corporation earlier last week to give me some indication just what the situation with is the Farm Credit Corporation loans in Saskatchewan. A paper that they sent me, that is up to date as far as the end of October this year, indicates that there are approximately 24,000 accounts in Saskatchewan. Twenty-two thousand farmers have loans; some of them have several accounts.

Of these loans, 12,000 lie within the drought area, Mr. Speaker — 12,000 farmers in the drought area of Saskatchewan have loans. Of these 12,000, 2,811 are in serious arrears from Farm Credit Corporation. These arrears for these 2,811 farmers amount to more than \$71 million in arrears, and that is in arrears that both include the principal and the interest that's outstanding — \$71 million that the farmers have to cough up if they want to keep their land.

I think, if you'd look through the entire details and study the loans by category, all of us would agree to the severity of the situation. These are loans that they are faced with, and all they have to expect for an answer from this government is: borrow more money — borrow more money. Our Premier stood up and said, before he went to Ottawa, that these farmers can borrow still more money. Farmers that are trying to resolve their crisis situation, trying to resolve the seriousness of the problem, the heartache that's being caused, knowing that they're running behind more and more in their arrears, and told the government solution is to borrow a little more money.

Since this House started its session today at 2 o'clock, Mr. Speaker, I've been handed an announcement from the Hon. Mr. Wise who finally got around to, after delays and delays and delays, finally got around to announcing the federal drought relief package that was supposed to be the companion package with the loan package that was set out by this government. And let me read what they announced. A \$150 million program in total for the four western provinces — B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba; 95 million of that total will be paid before the end of the year and another 55 million before April next year.

Do you know how much that amounts to, Mr. Speaker? Less than \$5 an acre — \$5 and acre from the federal government to help out farms out that owe the Farm Credit Corporation that much money; \$71

million in Saskatchewan in arrears just to Farm Credit Corporation. And the minister, the federal minister whose own corporation is that far in arrears, is offering 95 million to all four western provinces. Not even enough to pay the arrears in Farm Credit Corporation.

We are facing a very, very serious crisis, Mr. Speaker. We have two callous governments, the one from Ottawa and the one from Saskatchewan, meeting in Halifax. And it's good they're that far away because if they were meeting in Saskatchewan I'm afraid they'd have some problems on their hands because the farmers would be in there trying to straighten them out and telling them what to do. They can't afford to go to Halifax, but they'd come to Saskatchewan even if they'd have to walk to try and get some help.

When you see press releases that were sent out for immediate press release of November 27, 1985, where the Premier is going to Ottawa and he's saying that today agriculture more than any other agenda item represents the best chance for consensus at the annual first minister's conference starting tomorrow in Halifax . . . Well if he's looking for a consensus, he's not going to get it from the farmers of Saskatchewan with just talk, with just talk about a problem and no assistance.

Mr. Speaker, we are gathered together here today to discuss an emergency resolution. Before our Premier went down to Halifax, on the 12th . . . I gave him lots of time. On the 12th I prepared a paper, together with some of our staff, that listed some points that we felt he should consider and include in a package to meet with the first minister's conference, not necessarily something that everybody could glibly agree with and not do anything about for this minority province — a situation where we've had a severe drought — but something that would address the problem. Consequently, after that, the Premier put together a little package.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish you and the rest of the members of this House would take the time to look at this package that the Premier is taking to the first minister's conference. This is the Saskatchewan position. There is a nice letter from the Premier at the front of the booklet as a preface, and then he's got 17 or 18 pages here that deal with what they're going to ask for. He says in his press release, we're going to get a consensus. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you he's going to get a consensus because he's not asking for anything. He's let down the farmers of Saskatchewan by going to Ottawa with a book full of words that don't put any money in the pockets of farmers.

Before the conference starts, Mr. Wise announces \$5 bucks and acre, less than \$5 an acre. What an insult to the farmers' intelligence. What an insult to the farmers of Saskatchewan to think that this is what he's going to do.

Well I'll tell you why Mr. Wise waited till today to make that announcement, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Wise waited to see what the political climate's like in Saskatchewan. When he saw the results that happened in the North East by-election, he said, there's no use spending any money in Saskatchewan; those boys aren't going to be able to pull it off anyhow; so we'll just forget about it, and we're not going to bother spending any money. That's why he came up with a minuscule program like this that gives less than \$5 an acre. When the farmers asked for \$50 in the severe drought area, he has the nerve to come up with \$5. I think it's despicable; I think it's terrible.

I think this session should have been called together in August when we knew how severe the problem was. When we knew the problems we were having with crop insurance, we should have got together and decided how we could correct the errors that were made in July when the cabinet came down to Assiniboia and even messed up that program, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've got a situation in Saskatchewan where people are getting very, very upset. The governments of Canada and Saskatchewan are meeting, and they have a responsibility to solve a crisis, and we came up with a book full of words and an announcement from the Minister of Agriculture that they're no going to do anything.

(1445)

I think the farmers of Saskatchewan, when they elected those two PC governments — the government of Mulroney and the Government of Saskatchewan, the PC government here — expected some action when a crisis arised. They expected these governments to act. They expected them to take positive, concrete measures to address and resolve the crisis facing Saskatchewan family farmers. They said, we're finished; we're sick and tired of a lot of talk; talk is cheap.

Maybe it's not so cheap to put together a fancy little booklet like this. I'm not sure what advertising agency put this together for the PC government. It's a fancy book. It's done up real nice. It includes a lot of flowery language, Mr. Speaker, but that would have bailed out one farmer. The price of this book would have bailed out one farmer, but the contents of this book aren't going to bail out any farmers. The 2,800 farmers that are in arrears to the Farm Credit Corporation aren't going to be bailed out by this book or by Mr. Wise's announcement.

You know, on Monday night I watched the Premier on television. He was looking very sad, but he made a statement that made me happy. He made a statement that made me very happy because he said, we're going to listen. Well I gave him a message on November the 12th. So I presented him a list and an agenda to put in his book, and a look at the book, he hinted at some measure of assistance in the line of petroleum . . . Approximately 22 cents. Twenty-one, maybe, or 22. But even at that, that's an insult. Alberta farmers were getting 32 cents a gallon, and this year, they were announcing an increase where they were going to double it. My friends and my cousins that are farming in Alberta are getting 64 cents a gallon off their fuel. And we're now finally going to get 22 cents, when he's agreed and allowed the harvest tax that come in and took 9 cents, and now another cent a litre is coming in on the first of January. They're giving with one hand, but they're almost taking as much with the other. We're not staying ahead.

The message that the farmers are saying to me and to the government — and they were happy to hear the Premier say he's going to listen. The time for talk is over. We are now facing a time for action.

The Mulroney government in Ottawa must stop turning its back on the Saskatchewan farmers, must start protecting the farmers. Let's stop protecting the banks and start protecting the farmers, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if the little proposal that he put together before he went to Ottawa was designed expressly for the banks or if it had some farmers in mind. If it did, I'm not sure which one. I'm not sure which one because I don't know an awful lot of farmers that want to borrow more money at any interest rate — at any interest rate. I don't care what level it is. They are sick and tired of the burden and the debt that's laying on their shoulders, and the thought of even seeing a banker who's standing there with his hands up and saying, when are you going to pay up, is scaring them. I'm not sure that the business men that have their lots full of equipment and can't get any more money, have accounts outstanding with farmers, are going to be able to get that or if it's going to go straight to the banks.

I wish I'd know. I wish I'd know, because maybe they could help a little bit. Maybe it might do some good, but the farmers are saying that message loud and clear, Mr. Speaker, the time for talk is over. It's time for some action. It's a message that the people of Saskatchewan expect us in this legislation to convey equally clear to the Government of Saskatchewan. It's time for us to declare a message. I therefore urge all the members here to join me in supporting this motion.

I want to thank members opposite for giving us a chance to discuss this motion today, but specifically this motion will call the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada to do the following, and let me detail some of the things that I think we should be discussing in this motion: that this Assembly urge the Government of Saskatchewan to recognize the crisis facing farm families because of low commodity prices, high input costs and the need for long-term stability, and that this Assembly urge the Government of Saskatchewan to press the Government of Canada to implement immediately at least concrete commitments to the farmers of Saskatchewan regarding, number one, one of the reasons that we're having problems in agriculture is because of the low price of grain.

So the first point we're saying is, we have to get back to the table and negotiate an international

grains agreement. That has been let slip too long, Mr. Speaker. We are suffering because we are not getting enough for our grain on the international market.

The second point that I think is very important in the price of grain and that'll affect about 20 per cent of our markets, and that's that we support parity pricing legislation. If we would have parity pricing in place, the farmers that are hurting the worst . . . According to this table from the Farm Credit Corporation, the farmers are hurting the worst are the farmers that have 50, 60, 70, \$80,000 loans, in that neighbourhood. They're hurting. If there'd be parity pricing legislation in place, Mr. Speaker, then they would adjust their cropping rotation so that the 20 per cent of the agriculture that's sold on the domestic market, they would adjust their cropping to such an extent that they would get in on that — let's say the number's 2,000 bushels per farmer.

The third point we're asking for is to reduce the level of the European beef imports. The beef people have received some help, and some emergency programs are in place that have kept the price down for the beef producers, and I commend the government for acting on their behalf and getting some money there.

But they would do a lot better if the European beef imports would be held back. It would be controlled so that the beef that's produced in Canada wouldn't have to compete with beef that's dumped on to the Canadian market and lowers the price, because I think Canada is abut self-sufficient in beef. We can eat as much beef as we can grow in Canada. And if we would hold down the imports that come from Europe, the price of beef would be a lot higher.

The other key issue that is really scaring me, Mr. Speaker, and a point that is very, very frustrating, and that is all this talk about free trade — all this talk about free trade. I hope our government presses heavily on the government of Ottawa, that they will refuse to sacrifice agricultural interests in their free trade negotiations. I think it's important, it's important that when they're talking free trade that they take a good look at the interests of Saskatchewan farmers, because that is one of the reasons that's causing this crisis.

I think that our government should be insisting, if they're going to spend money subsidizing fuel prices in Canada, I think they should insist that the federal government doesn't add on the additional increases that they talked about that they're going to do this year.

I think the federal government should be launching a national inquiry into farm chemical pricing. Very, very important to farmers when we see the price that . . . When prices are shaved down as low as they are, and the long-term predictions for wheat prices are going to remain low, the farmers' income costs have to be maintained. So I think we have to launch a national inquiry into the farm chemical pricing.

As I mentioned earlier in my remarks about the serious situation as far as Farm Credit Corporation is concerned, we should insist that the federal government do something about the arrears that farmers are facing with the Farm Credit Corporation loans.

I hope, and I would encourage with all the emphasis I can, that our government insists that we introduce an effective emergency farm relief program. I hope that they will not accept this less-than-\$5-an-acre emergency farm program that Wise thinks he's going to get consensus from Ottawa, at the convention in Ottawa. If they think that is enough, Mr. Speaker, we are in serious trouble. I have in my constituency very, very many farmers that were counting on a substantial pay-out in the drought relief area.

If you go down with me, Mr. Speaker, and visit some of the farmers in the Bengough-Rockglen areas, or across the southern part of my constituency where they've lost four crops in a row — you would have to come with me — if I'm supposed to go out and tell those farmers that they're going to get \$5 an acre, because they're not going to survive; there's no way they're going to survive if that's all that's in this package. I think that they have to introduce an effective emergency relief program. If it's going

to be this little amount, if it's going to be \$95 million this year, that's not enough. That isn't going to do it.

The next point we're urging that the federal government do is freeze the grain freight rates for the next five years. I think that all the talk that started way back in the days of Otto Lang, and was continued when your government took over, your friends in Ottawa took over, the grain freight rates have gone high enough. I think the farmers are saying it's time you freeze those rates. If you're going to listen to farmers, and you're going to listen to people like you promised you should, freeze those freight rates for five years.

The final point we have in this motion that we're urging the Government of Canada to do is restore the \$50 million cut from the federal agriculture programs. I've met with and talked to ranchers and farmers that are here at this great show we're having in Regina. They're very perturbed about some of the implications of this \$50 million cut. I don't know if you boys across are following it or not, but do you realize that they want to close down or privatize the blood testing facility in Ottawa where they do blood tests to ensure the pedigree of animals.

I think this is a serious thing that's affecting the ranchers. They're saying to me: don't let them do it; that service is the best service we've had to ensure our higher grade prices. A double-muscle animal that came from my constituency sold for \$50,000 at a sale. That animal was blood tested and certified that it was a true breed of the Piedmontese cattle. I'd like to insert in here a compliment to a former member that held my seat, Roy Nelson, and a group that had the Piedmontese cattle that got that great price for the sale, and I don't think it will be topped by any other herd or any other breed of cattle.

But if we take away this \$50 million that's in federal agriculture programs and privatize it, farmers and ranchers that are into the purebred cattle are going to suffer very, very severely.

As far as the province of Saskatchewan is concerned, here are some of the points that we think that this Assembly urge the Government of Saskatchewan to take immediate concrete commitments to farming regarding: number one, when they talked about reducing the costs of farm fuel, Alberta's program to reduce the price of fuel by 32 cents. Now 22 cents isn't bad, but when you compare it to 64 cents, when you compare it to 64 cents in Alberta, it is just not enough. So they reduce the cost of farm fuel by 32 cents a gallon. Restore the property tax relief for farmers.

Councillors right across the board that I've been meeting with, Mr. Speaker, are telling me that the taxes aren't coming like they did before. That incentive to pay taxes on time to get the property improvement grant isn't there, and it's going to affect the rate of taxes coming in, councillors right across the board are telling us.

SARM, at their south district regional meeting in Assiniboia, passed a resolution, unanimously supported by all the councillors that were there, saying restore the property tax relief for farmers.

The next point is: restore the beef stabilization plan. Provide the \$30 a head to drought-stricken beef producers. The federal government gave you \$30 a head to bring it up to 90, and what did you do? You stuck it in your pocket. You confiscated it from our ranchers and farmers. I think that's wrong. Restore that; provide that to the beef producers; be part of the package that's going to introduce an effective emergency farm relief program.

The next point is: extend and improve farm foreclosure legislation.

And then the final one: to keep agriculture in the forefront, to do the research that's necessary, to train our young people that's necessary, construct a new College of Agriculture building in Regina. This is the motion, Mr. Speaker, that I intend to move when we're through with this debate. I urge all members to support this resolution, that we as an Assembly take some stands as far as instructions that we are going to send to Ottawa. Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

(1500)

MR. LINGENFELTER: — Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to become involved in the debate on a rule 17 motion put forward by the member for Assiniboia-Gravelbourg on a most important and urgent issue.

Those of us who are elected members from rural Saskatchewan, and I suppose I might say particularly from the south and west part of the province where a severe drought was dealt with by the farmers and lived with by the farmers, not for one year in some cases, but two and three, and in some areas — in the Bengough area, as my colleague has indicated — up to six years of drought, grasshoppers, and they have had to live on very, very little.

Mr. Speaker, they have watched with a great deal of surprise as the Conservative governments, not only in Saskatchewan, but as well in Ottawa, have taken a very cavalier approach to the drought and to the problems that are faced by literally thousands of farmers in the drought area.

I don't want to limit my remarks to the drought area, because I want to say that, from listening to my colleagues from Pelly and Quill Lakes, the problem associated with farming is not only in the area of the drought, but extends right across the province of Saskatchewan, due to low commodity prices and high input costs.

But I suppose what the farmers find disturbing, Mr. Speaker, is at a time when they are being told over and over again by politicians of the Conservative government in Ottawa and in Saskatchewan that the cupboard is bare, but there is no money to help out the families and small-business people who are up against the wall.

And they find it hard to believe, for a number of reasons. Mr. Speaker, they find it hard to believe that there's no money for drought aid in the coffers of the Saskatchewan province when they watch the actions of the Conservative government and the cabinet travel around the world. I see the member from Wilkie is in his seat with his usual smile on his face — pleasant fellow. He would be one of the people who should be standing in his place and defending the farmers because he represents a rural area. We'll listen with interest to see whether or not he will rise to the occasion and put on the Table what he believes should be done for the farmers in his constituency.

Mr. Speaker, the farmers are hard pressed to understand this government when they watch \$300 million going into the oil industry — \$300 million for an industry which is announcing annually record profit increases. And the member from Lloydminster would, and should, rise in his place and explain to the farmers why, when the oil companies in his area are getting 141 per cent increase in profits, how is it that the farmers are being told that the cupboard is bare?

Mr. Speaker, it is basically a question of fairness, a government that is treating, on the one hand, the oil companies and the speculators — the land speculators around Regina and urban centres — in one manner, and treating farmers and working people and senior citizens in yet quite another. And there are many, many cases of farmers who are simply folding their tents and leaving the farm because of bankruptcy, forced sale, or because of flow equity in their property.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about what could and should be done, there are a large and long list of programs that could be introduced both by the provincial government, which has been outlined by my colleague from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg any number of times, very few of which have been picked up on by the provincial Conservative government.

I must say that even the area of crop insurance, and the minister who runs crop insurance, I think, this summer had a very, very difficult time. I don't want to say that the minister of crop insurance

didn't do his job because I'm sure he's working as hard as he can. But the program changes that were announced by the Premier were changing without consultation with the farmers or with farm groups, were changing so quickly that the minister of crop insurance was simply fighting fire all summer. This is what the farmers and, I believe, what the minister, in his own way, has indicated through the press and otherwise.

He's been making changes to crop insurance which have caused not only delays in the crop insurance payments to farmers, but also mass confusion and unfairness in the way crop insurance is being handled and crop insurance money is being paid out.

In earlier speeches we have often talked about the role of the members of the legislature in defending the farmers, and I think one of the main reasons, Mr. Speaker, that we're in this kind of situation in the province at the present time is that even the members of this government who come from rural Saskatchewan are simply not being listened to by the people who sit on the treasury benches of this government. Because I feel confident, if they had been listening to the member from Morse, or had been listening to other rural members, that the plight of farmers in south-west Saskatchewan would not be ignored. I think what we have here is a Conservative government that's listening to the people who pay for their way to elections and are ignoring the very people — even their own back-benchers — when it comes to solving the plight of the Saskatchewan farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the plight of the farmers and the action of the government is even more hard to understand when we look at the record of the federal government of announcing a billion dollars for collapsed banks; a billion dollars for purchasing 1,800 used service stations from Gulf Oil; has money for royalty breakdowns or forgiveness of taxes to oil companies. When it comes to farm programs — today we have the announcement, the long awaited announcement by John Wise, based on his findings of the MP for Assiniboia, and the announcement basically says this: that there will be a \$150 million program for the four western provinces. That's less than \$40 million in Saskatchewan where we have 60,000 farmers; \$40 million when they had \$1 billion in the bank — for one bank — \$1 billion for a tax break for one oil company — Dome — but when it comes to the 60,000 farm families, how much money do they have? They have \$40 million — \$40 million, Mr. Speaker, works out to less than \$5 an acre.

I can tell you that farmers in the south-west who were asking for, and expecting, something up to \$50 an acre; less than \$5 an acre is not going to solve their problems.

And I would concur with my friend and colleague from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg when he says that the farmers will not be happy with the 21 cent-a-gallon rebate — and I note, in the Bill that has been tabled, it is a rebate and not some sort of reduction in fuel costs — it will be a rebate as outlined where the farmers will have to keep their bills and send them in and collect the money back — a rebate of 21 cents a gallon after the increase of 15 cents a gallon by the federal government since September 1st. By the time next spring rolls around, if there are no more increases in the federal tax on fuel, we will have a rebate program of 6 cents a gallon.

And I say to you, at a time when the fuel increase has been in the area of 40 or 50 cents a gallon in the past three years, a 6 cent-a-gallon rebate is not what the farmers were asking for. What they were asking for — and I notice members are saying what did they want — they look at the Alberta program which will pay them 64 cents a gallon off at the bulk station. When you fellows can come up with 6 cents a gallon, I think you should keep your heads hung when it comes to dealing with the farmers in Saskatchewan. At 6 cents a gallon, that's what your rebate is when you take off the 15 cents a gallon that the federal government has increased in taxes since September 1st.

The member from Regina South will have a hard time doing the arithmetic on that, but it works like this: there was a 10 cent increase in taxes, federal tax, on September 1st. There will be another 5 cents on January 1st. This program that you've introduced will come into effect next spring. So what you have is a 21 cent rebate from your government, and an increase of 15 cents from the federal government, and that will leave the farmers with a break of about 6 cents.

Now if you have difficulty understanding that, get some farmer from the coffee row in Shaunavon at the Co-op to explain how that will work.

And the other provinces, Manitoba and Alberta, have many other programs that they have brought into place, and they weren't as severely affected by the drought as what Saskatchewan was. For example, in Alberta they have an Alberta farm fertilizer price protection plan which offers a \$50-a-tonne rebate to farmers. You will know the grasshopper program which they put into place that paid for one-half of all the chemicals that was used by farmers who were dealing with the severe blight of grasshoppers that they had this year. They have a program that will pay up to \$75 per head, which is indeed richer than the one that we have here in the province, as we mentioned, 64 cents a gallon for fuel, and the list goes on and on.

And I wanted to say, as well, in Manitoba one of the programs that they are bringing into place will reduce the interest rates on existing loans down to 8 per cent. When the farmers in our province are asked to deal with this government or the federal government, they're told that the Farm Credit Corporation can not afford to lower the interest rates from 15 per cent or 13.5 per cent, which they are now, even to the bank rate of 10 or 11 per cent.

We have a federal government that's so concerned about farmers that in the area of Farm Credit Corporation they're charging 3 or 4 per cent more than the Royal Bank or the credit unions in our towns and cities in the province of Saskatchewan.

There are some farmers who are having a hard time believing that Brian Mulroney and the present federal government are on the side of Saskatchewan farmers. And I believe, along with my colleague from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg, that Brian Mulroney and the federal Tories have indeed written off Saskatchewan politically because of the wrongdoings of the provincial Conservatives. I think that's what's happened.

And we'll see when the Husky oil upgrader gets dropped whether or not the minister in charge of Energy and Mines will still be smiling, because I say to him that they are dropping this government as quickly as they can in the area of farm policy, and we'll see whether they do it with the upgrader. We'll see what happens on Christmas Eve, my friend. We'll see what happens on Christmas Eve when it comes to supplying low energy costs to farmers whether we have an upgrader at the Husky operation in Lloydminster, but I very much doubt it.

I think what has happened here is the federal government has read the same polls as these birds have, Mr. Speaker, and they've decided to drop them; that they're a hot potato; that they're a liability. And what's happened here, Mr. Speaker, is the federal Tories and the provincial Tories can't decide who is the most unpopular. Devine's trying to drop Mulroney because he thinks the tuna scandal is too much for him to handle, and the reverse is true. Mulroney can't get rid of these guys quick enough and are writing them off.

And I say to you, Mr. Speaker, both are wise in their own roundabout fashion. Both are in a great deal of trouble. I say to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members opposite, that when it came to the flooding in the north-east part of the province — that was in 1983, I believe — that the money was available. There was an election coming up. There was a federal election coming up, and there was a Liberal government in Ottawa. There was a provincial government Conservative government. There was a problem in north-east Saskatchewan. Was there money available for the farmers then with a federal election on the horizon? Well, I'll tell you, the Premier in Saskatchewan couldn't get that money out quick enough during that campaign and put the pressure on poor old John Turner to divvy up his half.

(1515)

That was in the middle of a federal campaign in 1984, and the money went out. It went out and no questions asked. They drew some lines around some RMs and they shipped the cheques out. If they missed somebody, they'd come into the minister's office and he'd write a cheque out. That's how

that program worked. But one has to ask why that kind of an agricultural policy in the middle of a federal campaign, and now, with six years of drought in the south-west, not one cent in terms of an acreage payment from the provincial government.

Well, I want to tell you why there's a change. It's because there is now a federal Conservative government in Ottawa, and these, members opposite aren't about, not yet, to embarrass the Conservative government in Ottawa. But I see something happening that is even more interesting, and that is a change in what is being said by the provincial government about those federal Tories in Ottawa. It seems to me there is a little orchestrated, or otherwise, fight being operated, or being started, between those federal Conservatives, unpopular federal Conservatives, and the provincial Conservatives.

Now it may be my imagination, but what I see unfolding here is a little bit of a fight about who is responsible for the farmers of Saskatchewan. Grant Devine announces a little program for farmers here of less than a dollar an acre, and then says the rest is up to the federal government. He announces about 90 cents an acre for the drought-stricken farmers and says the rest is up to the federal government. And now we have here today an announcement of John Wise who says about \$4 an acre for the farmers of Saskatchewan, and now it's up to the provincial government. And I see a little fight starting here, and I wonder whether or not the members read 'Back Rooms,' where that old Liberal tactic of having the provincial government fighting those eastern people, and I qualify that phrase, is being orchestrated here to try to attempt to bail this government out.

I'll tell you it won't work because you're politicians of the same stripe, and the people of Saskatchewan know it. It started in the federal election where you had the lowest percentage of the vote anywhere in Canada. It started in Thunder Creek where your vote went down by 20 per cent, and I think Regina North East confirmed what many of us have believed for some time.

So I say to you that if you want to solve the problems, both politically and economically, for yourselves and the Province of Saskatchewan, in rural Saskatchewan, I tell you, quit playing games with the farmers. Quit playing games with the farmers. Put some cash into the economy. Put some money into the economy of farmers like you are into the pockets of your oil friends, and you may have some people continuing to vote for you. But if you continue to play games that you are at the present time, you will find that the results in the next provincial election will be the same in rural Saskatchewan as they are in the urban centres.

So I say in closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I find it hard to believe that a government, which became elected three or four short years ago on a policy of solving the problems as they were listed by the members in the opposition at that time, would now have the solutions to problems. And I read the recommendations that you're taking to the Halifax meeting with a great deal of interest, and they don't talk about what you're going to do about the severe outbreak of grasshoppers next year. I don't see that mentioned here, but if you ask the member from Morse he would be able to tell you.

I don't know who the Premier's talking to any more, but what it says here is, governments must work with producers to improve farm management, expertise, and farm financial planning. Grant Devine says farmers are bad managers. Well I don't think they are. I think the reason they're in trouble is because of government mismanagement. And for you to go to Halifax saying you've got to solve the farmers' problem by teaching them how to farm, I think has a little difficulty in selling in rural Saskatchewan.

And I notice under trade, what are you taking to Halifax? Private traders should be permitted and encouraged to participate with the Canadian Wheat Board in larger and more diversified food deals. Now what's that about? Private traders should be permitted and encouraged to participate with the Canadian Wheat Board. Well, there will be many farm groups who will be interested in Grant Devine's position on allowing private traders to compete with the Canadian Wheat Board. I don't know whether the member from Morse read this document that was taken to Halifax and whether he agrees with it, but I say to you that that this not going to fly in rural Saskatchewan.

And then we go on to some very innovative ideas that we should be working on. Number five, under technology and resource development: non-intensive irrigation should be promoted. Now hat does that mean? That means damming up creeks and making sloughs. Now that is very innovative. I don't know how many farmers are going to ever grapple with this complicated technology that you guys are promoting. But I'll tell you that damming up creeks and making sloughs is going in the wrong direction because many farmers are going the other way for the past 20 years; that is, to drain sloughs and seeding them, and the member for Morse knows that. So for you to go to Halifax to say that what we should be doing is non-intensive back-flooding is a far cry from what you were promising in irrigation prior to the 1982 election.

I see members are not amused by the kinds of things that are in this document, but I would encourage the back-benchers to begin to get involved in the political system in this province. That's what you're paid for. These are your documents. And I'll you that this is not what the farmers wanted the Premier to take to Halifax, and I would encourage you to support the motion put forward by the member for Assiniboia-Gravelbourg because they are the relevant issues that farmers are facing at the present time. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. GERICH: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, to show that this government is listening, I would like to read a news release that was issued on November 22nd that shows that the Premier and his government are listening to the farmers and the farm groups of Saskatchewan.

Premier Grant Devine today announced a major two-part program to assist Saskatchewan farmers affected by low commodity prices and poor production.

A \$1.2 billion financial assistance program will provide operating loans for farmers to plant their 1986 crop.

All Saskatchewan farmers will be eligible for a repayable cash operating loan of \$25 per cultivated acre. Loans will be provided at 6 per cent annual interest rate. For the farmer with 1,200 cultivated acres, the program will provide \$30,000 in operating funds. The saving in interest cost to the farmer with the 1,200 acres will be \$1,800 the first year.

Program details and application forms will be available earlier in this new year.

Premier Devine also announced the Saskatchewan farm economy will receive \$42 million from revenues collected from oil royalties.

All Saskatchewan farmers will be eligible for a 21 cent per gallon saving on farm fuel to reduce the high cost of farm inputs.

(He says:) 'We believe in returning oil royalties to Saskatchewan farmers especially during a down-turn in farm economy and to underscore our commitment to agriculture. For example, a grain farmer with 1,200 acres will save \$1,300 per year in fuel costs.'

In making this announcement (and I repeat again) Premier Devine (and his government) acknowledge the input and advice of producers and farm organizations (such as the Wheat Pool and grain growing associations). 'These programs will provide cash to the farmers in a way that is responsible and fair to all citizens of the province, the Premier said.

And I would like to go on today, for immediate release from the Department of Agriculture from the federal government, that Mr. John Wise, the Minister of Agriculture, has just announced:

\$150 million Crop Disastrous Assistance Program. The payment to the farmers will be

based on crop insurance records, county or rural municipality yield records. It is expected that about 30,000 farmers will be eligible for the assistance. Payments will be based on yield deficiencies. The amount of assistance will vary with the degree of crop damage suffered by the farmers due to drought. The federal government will provide \$95 million for this program this fall and \$55 million in the spring, with Saskatchewan receiving the majority of the assistance. The federal funding will augment emergency assistance provided by this provincial government this year.

While the Crop Insurance and Western Stabilization programs have been paid out nearly \$2 billion in the past two crop years, the successive years of drought, grasshopper infestations, poor harvest weather, and low commodity prices have left a great many farmers with an insufficient cash flow to meet their expenses and continue to produce crops. This is an emergency situation, and unless special action is taken, parts of the western agri-food industry may be permanently lost with the associated losses to the national economy.

In response to the cold harvest that was in the North, Charlie Mayer, the Minister of the Canadian Wheat Board, announced that the government will provide interest-free cash advances up to \$30,000 to help cover the cost of grain drying. As allowed under the Prairie Grain Advanced Payments Program, further assistance will also be provided for unharvested grain.

And it shows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the provincial government and the federal government are making an initiative to help the farmers out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to point out to my disillusioned colleagues across the way that these difficulties that are pressing the farmers today, and so many farmers today, started with the high interest rates back in 1980 and '81 and into 1982 when those members were in power. And did they help alleviate the interest programs or the pressures that were suffered by the farmers with 22 and 25 per cent interest? Not at all. They did nothing to help the farmers whatsoever. They came up with a program such as the land bank. Can you feature that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a program such as the land bank to help the farmers, to help make serfs out of them? Complete removal ownership of pride — a real socialist attitude. And under the Regina Manifesto their idea was to have, to hold, and control all properties under state control.

I would like just to expand on their policy three years before we got into government in starting up the land bank. And in the previous three years before we got into government, according to the member from Shaunavon, in the Bengough area they were really suffering hard times. The NDP, instead of helping the farmer, went and spent million of dollars to buy over 1.5 million acres of farm land and bring it into state ownership. Their goal was to turn farmers into share-croppers. In the meantime, over 9,000 farmers, family farms, disappeared under the NDP regime. Saskatchewan led the nation in the loss of farmers during the Blakeney administration.

The NDP had a fuel rebate program to help the farmers. It was a real good program. It had a ceiling on of \$300 — nothing, nothing to really help the farmers. It was eaten up in paperwork. There was education and health tax on farm electricity bills during their years. We have since removed that. Electricity rates and fuel rates increased significantly during the NDP term in office. In the last two years the NDP electricity rates went up 17 per cent — 17 per cent. That's really helping farmers when they're having it hard.

Their family farm was the family farm of Crown corporations. They were more worried about Crown corporations than they were about the family farm. And it just goes to show you that the NDP party that supports the unions and the unions support the NDP party, to cost the farmers more for their farm inputs . . . I don't know how the member from Shaunavon and the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg can support that theory. I'm at a loss.

(1530)

The NDP opposed the rural gasification distribution program that we brought together here in 1982 to get cheaper natural gas to the farmers. We brought that in 1982. The farmers this fall of 1985 are making use of it in their grain drying processes right now.

Getting back to the land bank, in their time in office they helped 151 farmers. In our time we've helped 3,829 farmers under the 8 per cent money Farm Purchase Program, and are moving right along.

The removal of the gas tax to help farmers — since 1982, we removed their 20 per cent gas sliding tax, and this saves the farmers per vehicle about 3 to \$400.

The agricultural sector in this province is the single most important industry in Saskatchewan and it relates to Saskatchewan's wealth and growth. It is very important to the Redberry constituency in particular, in that it is the total industry, and this government has taken significant steps to strengthen this over the last two and a half years. Some of the programs that I could relate to again are the removal of the gas tax, the Farm Purchase Program, gas distribution, and today's announcement of our 21 cents per gallon oil royalty return.

During the 1984 year — agriculture did take kicking again. We had drought in the south-west and flooding in the north-east and the farmers experienced in both cases the extreme. But the farmers scrambled to make the best of a bad situation and so did the government of the day. We came in with a program that offered \$1,600 per rancher to help move his herd to greener pastures. In the north-east, in the flooded area, \$8 per acre was paid to these farmers to cover their operating costs with the flooding. Some of the farmers have lost their crops three years in a row.

To put it into concise form, in 1984 the province of Saskatchewan experienced the most severe drought since 1930. It became imperative that farmers needed help not only to get through the winter but able to put their crop in this spring, and it came through with both drought and flood assistance for provincial farmers and thus instil some of the sense of optimism for the upcoming year. And this year with the drought that we had down in the South, the crop insurance program came about real well.

Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can say that agriculture today is the largest industry in the provincial economy and the government's responsibility is to help those within the industry remain economically viable. I will, at this time, let some of my colleagues go on to impress upon the House and the legislature and the members opposite how good a job the government is doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. KATZMAN: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've received a copy of the motion tabled by the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg and have read it line by line. His comment is that the Assembly recognize the grave agriculture crisis facing Saskatchewan farmers. I agree with that. And I agree the Assembly must recognize those issues.

The member that spoke just before me indicated some of the things that the government is doing: the 21 cents, the \$25 on the acre, the \$60 on the cow, on livestock, and so forth.

It then goes on that the Government of Canada should do something, and the Government of Saskatchewan, to solve and resolve the crisis. When did the crisis start, Mr. Deputy Speaker? When did the crisis start for farmers? The member that spoke before me indicated — let's go back to '78, '79, '80, '81, and those periods of high interest rates and no help from the government.

Let's go down to it. He suggests that we should recognize and that the government's job is to resolve the crisis. There is only one way that we will never have a crisis in agriculture. And if you go back to the days in the Bible and you will go back to Egypt when the Pharaohs said, you must put a little away in the times of plenty for the times of need. And unfortunately, during the times of plenty you forgot to

put any away so that the people could have it in the times of need.

I thank the member from Assiniboia for sending me over that list he referred to in his speech. Negotiate for an international grains agreement. That is a very pious and excellent comment. I agree with him. It was suggested by Andy Schmitz in Saskatoon at the first agriculture conference sponsored by this government, the Conservative Government of Saskatchewan, that we must sit down with our partners in the producing world and do something to protect the farmers. We can't do it alone. But at a conference in Saskatoon, started by the Government of Saskatchewan, some of the motions were put in place to start looking at that idea.

Support parity pricing legislation, he says. What does parity pricing legislation mean? Who do I talk to find out an answer? Because the more people I talk to, the more answers I am told by them, because they're not sure what parity pricing is. That be from your federal members of the New Democratic party to members of the other groups that are suggesting it. So we have to first find out, what does it mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before you can really resolve it.

Reduce the level of European beef imports. We are a trading nation and a trading province, and unfortunately that agreement was signed before we became government or the present government in Ottawa became government, and we are locked into it for a period of time more, and then we can negotiate our way out of a very terrible agreement.

He goes on: roll back the recent 9 per cent gallon farm fuel increase. Let's go back in history, just a little bit of history, since I've been a member of this House since '75. I have seen two, for sure — possibly it was three times — that the NDP, while in government, suggested a farm rebate on fuel: 7 cents, as the member said earlier, up to \$300. It came on just before an election and went off right after the election. What was it, other than an election gimmick?

We have come into government; we said we would reduce the cost of fuel. We took off the 20 per cent sliding scale tax. It was off the same day the government was sworn in. The NDP have said if they ever get to be government they're going to bring back that tax. That's one of their motions; they've said it. So they have now told the people of Saskatchewan: yes, when you are government, Conservatives, we are going to demand the world, but when we are government we will take it all away from you. That's what you said.

You know, we want you to go through this list, Mr. Speaker. Introduce efficiency energy farm relief programs. Farm energy cost. Let's talk about that. Today in question period, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they criticized the natural gas program that will reduce farmer's input costs on fuel at least 50 per cent. They criticized it. You can't, fellows . . .

I think you all know Connie Wilson, the lady that phones in to all the open-line shows. Well, I told her when she dropped in on one of the shows I was on, that she must learn to tell the truth and not be speaking bull droppings every time she comes on the air . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I would love to answer those two comments from your seats, gentlemen, but I do not have the right.

You know, he asked for 32 cents per gallon. Never in the history when you were a government did you ever do anything more than 7 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . .

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should remind the member who speaks from his seat that his government forced the Speaker to remain in his chair so he could go knock him off at a nomination meeting. Let's talk about things like that if you would like, Mr. Member for Quill Lakes.

Introduce an emergency farm relief program. Do we want a program that goes on, is there, and we know it's there ahead of time, and we know how the system will work if something should misfall the farmers? Yes, that's what the farmers tell us: we don't want a hit and miss program; we want a program that's there, and we can continue to use it and know it in advance. The suggestion from the farmers has been . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member for Assiniboia-Gravelbourg, I allowed you to speak without interrupting you. I would assume that you would not be arrogant and would

give me the same courtesy.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the farmers want a long-term program where they know what the rules are ahead of time and that the rules won't be changed constantly. He referred to, when he spoke about the changes in crop insurance that have happened over the past year, trying to assist the farmers. I agree, there were some changes being made as the thing went on. Now the suggestion is, and the people are working for a permanent plan that will automatically kick in if problems develop, so people know. Back to the Bible, when it says, you put away during the good years for the lean years when we go back to Egypt. That's Joseph of the Bible.

He makes a comment, and I think the member was incorrect in the statement, but I will accept that. He said, construction of a new agriculture college in Regina. I assume he meant Saskatoon. It was just a slip. It was just a slip, I assume, and I accept that.

The importance of agriculture in Saskatchewan, nobody will argue. It is the backbone of Saskatchewan. And as I went through the member spoke before me — I'm sorry, the two members, the mover and seconder — as I said, I could almost support the motion. There's only two words that I might want to change, and that's 'to resolve.' I think we should try 'to cure.' It's an easier way to say it. That's talking phonetics,

But then when I talk and look at the long list, the shopping list, I say the shopping list does not match the motion that we gave an emergency debate. And the member knows the rules enough that if the government hadn't voted today with you, we would not even be discussing this issue. And that's the first sign to show that we believe it's an important issue, because the members on this side were saying yes when the Speaker asked, and the members supported your motion, so the debate went forward because we are concerned with the crisis in agriculture.

But we must take methodical step by step to solve the problem, not rash and foolish moves that will not work. So I know that many of the members . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I would hope the arrogant member would allow me to speak, as I allowed him to speak.

I would suggest that many of the members on this side of the House are going to want to speak on certain points of this debate. I only make one comment, and then I will leave it to others to make additional comments. When you made your reference to the Farm Credit Corporation monthly statistics earlier, I happen to know that a lot of these loans are long-term loans and some of them are down at 7 and 6 and 8 per cent money. They're the older ones. And there's some of them that are higher. I agree there, too. And a lot of people with the lower loan interest are saying, hold, I'm going to pay off the more expensive ones and let the others wait. And I've talked to a lot of farmers who are doing it. It's good business management to do things like that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I have the whole list for the province.

(1545)

But let us say that a lot of people are deciding to do that, Mr. Member. And that's good, smart business sense. Pay off the higher interest stuff like this. Don't let your farm chemical dealer, your farm agriculture machinery dealer, your local grocery store, go without his money — Farm Credit can do without and you pay them 5 or 6 per cent interest — because we have to keep our small towns alive, not as you did when you were government, forcing people to move out,

So I say to you when you throw your numbers out: how many of them are deliberately not paying and being late because it's smart business for interest rate reasons?

So I will suggest that your motion is excellent. The long list that you have on your shopping list needs some cleaning up, and should be cleaned up so it's rational and sensible, not just promise anything

when we're in opposition. And I will allow more of my members to speak, who are also involved in the agriculture industry.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. KOSKIE: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to join with my colleagues on this side of the House to emphasize the seriousness and the nature of the crisis in agriculture facing the farmers of Saskatchewan.

I think if one takes a look at the analysis that has been done by the Wheat Pool, they indicate that farm income could average under \$5,000. The realized net income this year will dip 75 per cent to the lowest level in 15 years. That is the nature of the crisis facing the farmers of Saskatchewan.

I think if you look at the nature of the crisis, certainly what is happening is the revenue to farmers who are fortunate, as in my area in my constituency, who got reasonable crops. But I talked to farmers, and well established farmers, and they've taken in their quota this year. And he said, I took in exactly the same number of bushels and the same grades, and he said, the revenue or the return is one-third less than it was last year. I'll tell you that the costs to that farmer have in fact increased during the past year, but his revenue has been cut by over one-third.

So all of the farmers are having a basic crisis in so far as the input costs are increasing, the input costs imposed on the farmers by chemical companies, on fertilizers and sprays, and on energy as well. And the price of their goods has not kept pace; indeed has gone down. So all farmers are facing a major crisis.

There's another group of farmers, the young farmers who got established when we were in government, and were making along fairly well. These young farmers bought some land and they bought some equipment, and what has happened today is that the prices have been deflating, their costs have been going up, and they are indeed in trouble.

And let's take a look at a little bit of history of this new government, this government that was going to listen and learn the problems, addressing the key economic base of this province — agriculture. And oh, it was going to be so much better when we got them together, you know — a Tory government here and one in Ottawa. And boy, would we work as a team and address those problems!

Well I'll tell you, they had a federal-provincial conference in Regina last year. And you know what.

AN HON. MEMBER: — A love-in.

MR. KOSKIE: — It was a love-in. That's right. And do you realize that the Premier of this province fell flat on his face and he didn't even raise the issue of the problems faced by the farmers of this province?

I want to go through a little bit of some of the very positive Tory approaches to working together and helping farmers. Well let's take a look. Like in the last budget, they got rid of the property improvement grant which was of some assistance to the farmers — \$80 million plucked out of the people of Saskatchewan's pocket.

They put on a home quarter education tax rebate, and they put it on for one year. As the problem got worse, they took that away. So they took off the property improvement grant. They took off the home quarter rebate. But I'll tell you, then they said, well we have to help them out a little more. So this year, they increased the income tax for any of them that were paying by levying a surcharge on your income tax, and they put on a sales tax on used vehicles — 5 per cent. Very, very positive steps, I must say.

Well let's a look and see what their counterparts have been doing since they got elected. Well

the federal government came along and they said, well we can't increase this gas; we have to increase it but we aren't going to increase it during the summer because we don't want to increase it while the tourists are driving around. But then when came fall, when the farmers were harvesting, they up the gas by 9 cents a gallon. What they propose to do further is to increase it another 5 cents on January 1st.

But they didn't stop there, these Tories of Ottawa. I was talking to a number of my farmer friends who are seed growers, excellent business men. I made representations to the Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa, and to the Minister of Agriculture in Saskatchewan. I said, you can't allow these rapid increases of inspection fees that they're imposing. And do you know what is happening? The seed growers — and it affects other farmers buying the seed from the seed growers. Germination test is one. That was \$10. Do you know what it's increasing to? Forty-eight dollars.

Licence. They have to take out a licence now. And they have to have that paid by October 1st — \$200. Other inspection fees are tripling and increasing by fourfold.

And so I say, if you look at the federal government's performance and you look at the provincial government's performance, the only thing that is consistent is that they're both Tory governments and their actions are in contradiction to the assistance that the farmers in fact need.

If you take a look and you ask, you know, what could or should be done, and addressing it on the basis of what is the nature of the crisis, either the farmers of this province have to get more for their produce or their costs have to be decreased — either one. Hopefully we can get better world price markets, because they sell on a competitive market.

And so what could and should be done in respect to the farmers during this very difficult time? Well, not as the federal government did, to decrease very substantially the expected amount that they pay out in the grain stabilization. I look at the Wheat Pool and they expected some \$200 million to be paid out this fall, and the amount that was paid out was \$75 million.

There's a couple of interesting things that are developing in respect to the so-called Tory agricultural policy that is being put together. You look at the federal government's proposal here of 150 million. Ninety-five million will be paid out before the end of the year, but they're holding back 55 million to be paid out before April. Well, there could be an election around May or June, so they're going to have 55 million that they can pour out there.

When you look at the provincial government's so-called rescue program of the farm problems, it's going to happen in the new year somewhere — in the new year. Well, I'll tell you, as I drove through southern Saskatchewan last summer, in a tour of caucus we went to meet with many of the farmers who had faced drought for three and four years. And coming from the northern half of the province, it was impossible to believe the conditions that existed. And when we spoke to them, we urged them to speak reasonably with their government to seek out some form of assistance. And all I can say is that now we have this Tory co-operation, but the farmers in the drought-stricken area have virtually no assistance — a miserable five — less than \$5 from the federal program. That's about what it averages out to. A miserable amount.

If you take the program that the Premier announced — and who knows who it applies to, because they make announcements without any details or structure of the program. You don't know if his program where he's going to allow a subsidized operating loan of \$25 an acre — no one knows whether it's going to apply to leased land as well as to land that is owned by the farmer. You don't know any of the details of who will qualify for it. Is there any security that has to be put up? How can the farmers intelligently analyze any of these programs, because this government here has consistently demonstrated their inability to manage programs; indeed, this province.

I want to say that, you know, when you look at some of the areas of assistance in the neighbouring province of Alberta, we'll note that they had a plan that subsidized fertilizers purchased after August

1st, '84, retroactive provision in it, and will last until July 31st, '86. The subsidy is \$50 a tonne for nitrogen, \$25 a tonne for phosphate. The Alberta grasshopper control assistance program was considerably more than what the provincial government here.

If you look at, in respect to counteracting some of the huge input costs of the farmers, and in talking to the farmers in my constituency and throughout the province, one of their major concerns is the rapidly rising cost of fuel. And in talking to some of the better operators in the northern half of this province, they say that the cost of fuel has increased to 15 per cent of the total cost of input.

What did Alberta do in respect to helping alleviate some of the costs? Well, the Alberta farm fuel distribution allowance was recently doubled from 7 cents per litre to 14 cents a litre, and this will last until March 31st, 1987 at a cost of \$150 million. A little bit difficult for our farmers in Saskatchewan under the same world market conditions to be able to compete against Alberta farmers who are getting this type of fuel subsidy, fertilizer assistance; and here we sit, promising that they would assist the farmers, but who have they assisted?

I'll tell you, the member from Saskatoon Sutherland knows who they've been assisting. They've been assisting the oil companies — \$300 million to the oil companies every year since this fellow took over. I'll tell you, they also like to help their financial friends like Pioneer Trust. There was no problem in coming into this legislature and handing out \$28 million to bail out Will Klein who helped them formulate the election that got them elected. Why wouldn't they? But for the farmers they are not prepared. Look at the federal counterparts, how quickly they can rise to the occasion to help their friends — hundreds of millions of dollars, billions to Gulf and to the Reichman boys, a billion-dollar tax saving they provided.

(1600)

And you fellows — the little bit that we had given to the farmers, you took away. And to the banks; well there's no problem finding \$2 billion to the banks because after all that's who we represent. And when it comes to the farmers, let it be clear, they have failed to address the problems of the farmers in Saskatchewan. They have an opportunity. In fact, if they even looked to their counterparts in Alberta, there is some basic assistance.

So I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that there have been some comments in respect to the past performance of other governments, and particularly since we were the government most of the time since 1944, they obviously were referring to us. But I want to say that in addressing some of the farmer's problems way back, you know, grasshoppers isn't a new phenomenon. But when it came to dealing with it this year, the Minister of Agriculture didn't know whether he was going to have a program, whether it was going to be to the municipalities or whether he was going to subsidize the chemical companies.

Well I'll tell you in Saskatchewan News here, back on April 21, 1959, and this is when Mr. Nollet was the Minister of Agriculture, when and when the problem was apparent, a million-dollar war was launched against the hoppers. In storage there you will see hundreds and hundreds of cans of chemicals used to address the problem — ready to go. And this year the program the Minister of Agriculture introduced was a disgrace in administration, and it was a disgrace in assistance to the farmers. I want to close, Mr. Speaker, in saying how very disappointed I am in this debate today that we did not have some of the front-bench members of the government who would stand up and address with us here today the crisis in agriculture.

But certainly I want to join with the other comments my friends have made, my colleagues have made, and to endorse the resolution that there is a crisis; that we need immediate action by the government, substantial action, or indeed the agricultural community as we know it will no longer exist in Saskatchewan, unless this government can be brought to its senses to listen to the reasoned approach of our critic and address the problem as the emergency demands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. MULLER: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to enter this debate. I certainly understand agriculture, and I understand the problems therein. I want to give the member from Quill Lakes a little lesson in geography. I think I farm further north than he does, and I'm still in the southern half of the province because . . . I do recognize northern Saskatchewan and we do have two seats up there. Maybe we don't have a great deal of agriculture in that area, but we do have a farm at Cumberland House which, I think, is in the northern half of the province. It's still in the southern half, my colleague says.

This came upon me fairly quickly today, so I've put a few notes together to try and address and explain to these people some of the things that we've done to help farmers in Saskatchewan. I wanted to compare them against some of the things that they did when they were in office. It is some of the things they did, not some of the things they didn't do. One of the things they did was to buy the land from farmers, remove all their equity, so they'd have no chance to borrow money. We started fight out in 1982 with an interest program to help farmers purchase land, and I think I have the amount of people here. In the Farm Purchase Program there's 3,829 beginning and developing farmers. I know that they certainly appreciate it because I talk to my farmers all the time as I criss-cross across my seat . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . The member from Shaunavon seems to like to heckle me because he doesn't like to hear the truth. But I let him speak when he was on his feet, and I would ask him to award me the same privilege or courtesy that I awarded him.

He said that we're a government of just talk. Well I've been criss-crossing my seat in the last three weeks, talking to a lot . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . (My seat runs east and west) . . . talking to a lot of farmers out there and they're certainly happy with the programs that we're bringing in and they're certainly happy with our \$25 an acre at 6 per cent. The two issues that they really focussed on was interest rates and fuel costs. They're really happy and excited about these new programs we're bringing in.

The member from Shaunavon mentioned about how good the Alberta programs are, and certainly if we wouldn't have had so much government mismanagement in the 1970s here and would have had the same size Heritage Fund as the Alberta government had, we certainly would have been able to help the farmers more, and not only the farmers — small-business men and other people.

One thing I have to respond to — and I see the member from Quill Lakes has left, but I want to respond to it anyway. He said that we had all kinds of money to bail out Pioneer Trust. We did not bail out Pioneer Trust. We paid money to depositors, not shareholders. And you know that as well as I do. We did not bail out banks.

This was brought into the debate by the member for Quill Lakes, so I think I have a right to respond to it. The money wasn't given to the banks. If the money was given to the banks, the banks would still be operating. The money was given to the depositors that had the money in the banks. I wanted to straighten that out because I don't like rumour and innuendo going around that isn't true.

We certainly have reacted to the farm problems as they have arisen. The \$125 cash advance to cattle. You give the same thing to the rancher and the cattlemen that the grain people have had for years.

AN HON. MEMBER: — Interest free.

MR. MULLER: — It's interest free. It's something they can pick up right away. The average turn-around from application to receiving money was three and one-half days, and if that isn't performance, I don't know what is.

We're listening to people, we're talking to people, and we're certainly going out and meeting people.

AN HON. MEMBER: — Sounds like arrogance to me.

MR. MULLER: — He talks about arrogance, from his seat. We don't hide behind closed doors at our convention and discuss important issues pertaining to agriculture . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. MULLER: — I would say that the arrogance is starting to show from those benches more so than from ours. They think it isn't arrogant to meet behind closed doors and talk over issues that are pertinent to the people of Saskatchewan, whether it be agriculture, or uranium, or what they were talking about nobody knows because it was behind closed doors.

I think it takes people that are open and willing to talk to people like our PC government has been over the last three and one-half years, and we will certainly continue to be. We certainly care about agriculture and all the people in Saskatchewan, and everything that's been done for agriculture will certainly overflow into small business and large business in Saskatchewan.

Under the former government, they almost closed down the oil fields. We're starting now to get the oil fields moving again, and as soon as we're getting them moving, we're passing some of that royalty back to farmers at 21 cents a gallon off their diesel fuel and farm fuel. I think this is a step in the right direction. Maybe they haven't gone far enough, but as we increase the oil fields and the interest in the oil fields, and more people in there working and producing more oil, we'll certainly be able to pass more on, and this could have been done if we wouldn't like I said, if we wouldn't have had the mismanagement from the 1970s in the buying of potash mines, buying of farm land. If we'd have generated the oil field then, we could have had a Heritage Fund that certainly would have not only supported farmers, but supported everybody in Saskatchewan through the bad times. And I think probably these fellows maybe have learned a lesson, but I think it's probably too late. We've proved it to be too late and . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: — They don't care.

MR. MULLER: — No, that's right, they don't care, like my colleague says.

I have many, many more points here that I would like to make, but I'm sure there's some of my colleagues that would like of get up and make their points known about how we support agriculture and farmers and small-business men and all people in Saskatchewan. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to express myself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MRS. CASWELL: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise to this occasion and speak on the agriculture concerns of this province. And yes, I have not changed my seat, I still am the MLA for Saskatoon Westmount; and yes, I'm running again; and yes, I've been nominated. As a matter of fact, I had a larger nomination meeting than the other fellow, although I was uncontested. But I was just answering a question.

I think it's very important that we recognize in Saskatchewan we don't have agriculture problems and we don't have urban problems. We don't divide people and the economy up into small segments and pit one against another. We have economic concerns, and when the economy is healthy in one segment, it spills over in any other segment.

And so it is absolutely essential in this caucus that those of us who hold urban ridings have a very strong interest and a concern of what happens in the agriculture community, just as I might say it is very important that those people who have a rural riding understand the concerns of those people who work for wages, who may be running their small businesses, a different small business than farming, but with all the same problems and concerns. Economy is not based on a situation where one segment can say: we are important; we're the primary segment, and everybody else depends on us.

(1615)

Because I was thinking . . . And I come, as most people from Saskatchewan come, from an agricultural community, and we all have our rural roots. It is the whole tradition of our province. We are here because we had people with independence and courage willingly who were willing to put down \$10 and homestead a quarter section of land. They learned independence; they learned freedom; and they learned you co-operate willingly to compete in the open market. And it is that heritage that we have given is why we have excelled in education, in economy, in industry, and in all kinds of aspects — the lessons we have learned by our agricultural past.

But I was thinking about that. If the farmers did not have the rest of the economy, those people who work in stores, businesses, research, etc., etc., they would have a quarter section of land, a wooden plow, and their wife who would have a washboard.

But then I thought, no, that's wrong. First of all, they needed a railroad. And many oriental immigrants whose children and grandchildren are leaders in the community were the ones who helped build the railroad.

So it has consistently been that we don't have an economy that we can say, well we'll solve one problem today in the agriculture community and we'll forget about the urban ridings; we'll forget about urban people; we'll forget about their problems. And that's why, in this caucus, we have MLAs who are concerned about Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan people.

Somebody wants me to mention Regina North East. First of all, I would like to congratulate the member from Regina North East for winning the seat. I was discussing this with one of my constituents — excuse me, Mr. Speaker, I know this is off the topic but I have to answer that and I promise to get back on — and I said, well, don't forget the Lord chasten whom he loves. Then this constituent said to me, but, Gay, if you're chastened by having one nice Ukrainian boy in the legislature, they must love the NDP a lot — the Lord must love the NDP a lot more than the Tories because he chastened the NDP in '82 a lot stronger than that. Perhaps the Lord knows that some of us, hopefully, are fast learners and some a little slower.

As I was attending a picnic in one of the northern areas of the province, they were telling me how it's difficult in their riding because they don't have a secondary income. They don't have an oil patch. When you have a bad crop, you can pick up a job in the oil patch like they do in the South. And of course, problems usually are worse wherever . . . People always see that the other side might have it a little easier.

But I think they had a good point there, that farmers need to have a strong economic base in this province. They need it for their industries so we can just not be exporters of raw materials. They need it when they need that alternate income in bad years, they need it for their sons and their daughters so that their only choice is to go away.

Farmers need assurance that we're not just creating one band aid solution after another because we know that when government steps into agriculture with both feet and mucks around, and instead of helping it, stifles it, we can have a situation like Russia.

Ever since the communists came in, they've had crop failures due to bad weather — 17 years in a row, they still have bad weather. And here at one time, Russia was exporting wheat. They certainly didn't have the best country in the world in terms of what we might conceive of as a democracy, but they were feeding themselves and they were exporting wheat all over the Europe and the world. After the communists came in and decided that they were going to control things and run things and tell people what to do, they've never been able to export wheat and we export to them. So it's very important that when we look at solutions that the solutions are the kind that do not exasperate the situation by over medication.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned that we have a real problem with the NDP in this province, that it's never occurred to them there are some areas in life that the government is not responsible for. And they even want to control the weather. What I'm was saying, Mr. Speaker, they missed the obvious point. What I was saying is that, obviously, the problem in Russia is not the bad weather but their industry, and they always say it's the bad weather. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are not in Russia and we do not have communism, thankfully for a democracy that has two parties in Saskatchewan.

And when we talk about the NDP policy, I understand that the Leader of the Opposition was talking about \$50 an acre for the drought areas. The researchers have informed me what that would mean personally to three farmers in that area, namely the member from Shaunavon and the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg and the former member from Morse, that that would work out to about a million dollars in their pockets.

When I go to my constituents who have a single mother with three children, who would like to stay home but have to work, and I tell them, you know, those farmers have a problem, and we have limited funds in the treasury, how important is it that some people in some areas would get that much money? And I think that what we have to recognize, when we think of these fancy solutions, who are we really helping and how far can we go to talk about a farm program and throw money at it indiscriminately without thinking exactly what is going on?

At the same time there are some very clear, precise ways in which our government has helped the farmers, and most certainly to decrease the tax that we have in fuel and in other ways certainly helps. Now we have a program that all farmers will be eligible for a 21 cent per gallon savings on farm fuels, and this is, I'm sure, very important. My colleagues will discuss this more.

One thing I want to talk about is that we must see the economy as a whole. As our Premier is going about North America discussing free trade, how important that will be to farmers and, yes, workers, and, yes, consumers in Westmount and other places. But what is the NDP position about free trade? Will they say yes to free trade because it will help the farmers or will they have to say no, no, we can't have free trade because, you know, the union leaders in the east don't like it? So who is really controlling the NDP? Will it be farmers who can have free trade when they see that it's a benefit to them, or will it be the eastern union leaders? And that's I think, what we have to know. There's one clear message that the electorate are always giving Saskatchewan people, Saskatchewan politicians, and that is they want to have politicians who are answerable to them, to the people who hire and fire them, to the electorate, not the eastern interests, whether they're big business or big unions. We will see how independent the NDP are of those eastern union bosses if they come on stream with free trade because it will help farmers.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, we have a case in point that we can show the whole province who controls the NDP. And if they don't come for free trade, then they're not for the farmers. They're not for the consumers. They're not for the workers of Saskatchewan. They're for the eastern union bosses, and make no mistake about it. You clearly have to be on the side of free trade if you're for farmers. So you know, let's have the pie in the sky \$50 an acre for the member for Assiniboia-Gravelbourg who flies a plane. There's children in my riding who are trying so hard to get a perfect unit of work done because they were promised a plane ride, because they never had a plane ride. They'll be really interested to know that the NDP would give money to farmers who own planes.

We have one province. We do not have a province split that we can please one group of people and ignore the rest of the people no matter how hit they are. And I might say that you might have learned some lessons in Regina North East either and I don't think you told that story when you were at the door, that they wanted to give \$50 an acre to big farmers in the South, whether or not they had problems.

And I would like to give the floor back to some farmers in this Assembly so they can tell more specifically about the kinds of things that we have done for farmers, but one thing we have done for

farmers, we brought them into the rest of the province and we have one people, Saskatchewan people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as an urban member, representing a Regina seat, to participate in this debate because I believe that all Saskatchewan residents are concerned that we have a prosperous and a strong agriculture sector in our province.

And there are certain people in my constituency who, live in urban Saskatchewan, are also farmers. They have spoken to me about their concerns with regards to an aid package for farmers, and I have had many individuals who are not directly related to the farming economy speak to me as well about the fact that there needs to be some kind of reasonable and fair assistance provided to farmers.

And the word that is stressed most frequently, Mr. Speaker, is the word ‘fairness.’ We believe farmers need to be assisted. We understand that if farmers are in difficulty, then small businesses are in difficulty, and the public sector is eventually in difficulty because there are fewer dollars flowing into the coffers of the provincial government. So everyone is very concerned about the farm sector, and rightly so — we in the cities just as much as those in the rural areas.

I rise also, Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Social Services, to express my concerns that an aid package to farmers must be a fair package to farmers.

It must be fair, Mr. Speaker, to those people in our province who are handicapped, who do not have the access to employment, who do not have the access to income that other people have. I’m sure the handicapped individuals in our province would say, yes, aid the farmers, but make sure it’s fair.

I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, the senior citizens who live in the nursing homes, and the low-income widow who lives in her own home and is struggling to get by in urban Saskatchewan, in Regina, in my constituency of Regina Rosemont, that the person would say to me, Mr. Speaker, yes, aid the farmers. She or he may have come from a farm background themselves, and they have said to me, aid the farmers, but whatever you do, make sure it is fair.

I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, that the social assistance client who is participating in a training program, wanting to upgrade themselves, wanting to become more independent, lacking a source of income at present, would want very much to see the farmers assisted, but would want that aid package to be a fair package.

I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, the foster parent with whom I have considerable contact in this province, who willingly and sacrificially gives of their time and their money as well to assist those children that don’t have parents, they would say, yes, aid the farmer. It must be done, but make sure it’s fair.

(1630)

The question then, Mr. Speaker, is which aid package, which proposal is fair? Fair not only for all the farmers, but fair for all of the people in the cities, fair for the people that I have just mentioned.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, the Premier announced an aid package which applies to all farmers — 6 per cent operating money to all farmers across the province — something which they have required, they have been asking for some time. And this government has responded. And I might add that most farmers that I have talked to from my riding, farmers from outside Regina, and I understand the farm groups themselves have spoken very favourably of this aid package as being a fair package.

I have heard the Leader of the Opposition speak against it. I have heard one or two other people speak against it. But the vast majority of people that I have heard speak very favourably of 6 per cent operating money going to farmers to assist them during this difficult time, and also they speak very

favourably about the fuel rebate.

Now I want to contrast that, Mr. Speaker. I want to contrast that in the context of fairness. The Leader of the Opposition has said he wants to see a \$50 an acre payment, cash grant, from the taxpayer into the pocket of the drought-stricken farmer. He has said that on occasions. Other people disagree with him — \$50 an acre payment. I have heard it loud and long across the province and I have heard nothing from him about up to 1,000 acres, my friend — nothing, nothing.

And I want to tell people of this province — \$50 an acre. Suppose we took the member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg, an NDP member of this Legislative Assembly from the drought area, and let's say that he has in the order of 20 quarters — and I'm not sure if that is entirely accurate but I suspect it's a reasonable figure. Well \$50 a seeded acre, add to that the crop insurance pay-out which that individual is going to get; we're talking about over \$200,000 of taxpayer's money going directly into the pocket of the NDP member from Assiniboia-Gravelbourg.

And then, Mr. Speaker, if we talk about the NDP member from Shaunavon, Mr. Speaker, who I understand has a fair-sized farm — perhaps above average in terms of size — \$50 an acre, plus the crop insurance payment coming, would amount to something over \$300,000 into the pocket of the member opposite.

And if we were to talk about the NDP candidate from the Morse constituency, one Mr. Reg Gross, whose farm is in the order of about 53 quarters, I understand, when you add to that the crop insurance pay-out, we are talking about something in the order, Mr. Speaker, of over \$500,000 — over \$500,000.

Now I want to put a question, Mr. Speaker, to an individual in this Assembly that I know is very concerned about fairness, because he spoke a lot about it during the last 28 days, and that's the member from Regina North East. We are all concerned about fairness. I want to ask the member from Regina North East: is it fair to the handicapped person in this city, to the senior citizen, to the widow, to the social assistance client undergoing training in this city, to the foster parent, to the single parent? Would it be fair to those individuals to see those members of the NDP caucus get literally hundreds of thousands of dollars going into their pockets? Would that be fair?

I don't believe for a moment that a \$50-an-acre payment would be fair, that it would be fair to the people of my constituency, that it would be fair to the clients of the Department of Social Services. I don't even think that the member from Regina North East would think that it's fair. Certainly, the majority of farmers don't think that it's fair. I think that any reasonable-minded person in this province would say \$50 an acre going into the pockets of three NDP members who are already quite well off — already quite well off — that is not fairness, Mr. Speaker, that is greed. That is greed. That is not fairness, and I think any reasonable-minded person . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

HON. MR. DIRKS: — Mr. Speaker, any reasonable-minded person is going to say 6 per cent operating money to all farmers across the province, that's fair. A fuel rebate to all farmers, that's fair. Changes to the crop insurance system, that's fair. But a \$50 an acre pay-out which is going to benefit NDP members who are already very well off, that's not fair, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. MARTENS: — I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to address the motion that has been presented by the members opposite, and I want to deal with it and preface my remarks by just reading a small portion here of a couple of sentences. It is in the book that the Premier is presenting to the conference in Halifax and it goes this way:

Canadian agriculture is facing difficult times in a turbulent world economy. Farm

incomes are threatened by the low commodity prices and continued high interest rates associated with North American monetary policy. Agricultural subsidies and regulations across the western world are distorting the natural comparative advantage of Canadian agriculture. A protectionist tide is denying access to the shifting balance of world trade. In the Prairies, natural disasters in the form of grasshoppers and severe drought and early snows add additional hardships and complications to the agricultural economy.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the thrust of the message that the Premier is bringing to the agriculture conference — the first time it is being placed on the agenda in Halifax. I believe it is very significant that the Premier of the largest land base for agricultural lands in the country represents us in the discussions at the national conference.

I have travelled my constituency fairly extensively in this past three months. I took note of a lot of things that have been happening there. I have farmers in my constituency who are in the drought area, very serious drought area, where zero was the crop production — zero. I had one these people come to me and say: crop insurance is a good thing; it's a very important function in the Canadian agriculture scene — very important. We should protect that institution in the Canadian agriculture economy. They have come to me and said that if the provincial government sends me cash I will take it. But I question the advisability of it. I've had many, many people come to me with that.

I have been visiting people in the Simmie area where they've had lots of problems down there with drought for two years in a row; down in Hodgeville where they've had it for two years in a row; down at Ponteix — I was there for their Pool meeting — and they have had it for a number of years. What do I hear from there? What do I hear from Cabri, Saskatchewan where some of those farmers had 30 bushels to the acre? What do I hear from Herbert? Some farmers had 30 bushels to the acre.

What did I hear from Bengough? I was down at that meeting that they had there, Mr. Speaker, and I want to point out something that I heard there. The reeve of the municipality of Bengough was very articulate in leading that meeting. He held the questions to being precise and on target.

There was one gentleman there that couldn't be understood because he was an older man and he couldn't speak very well, so I took the liberty to go visit with him. He had NFU written across the top of his cap and he was an older man and he was not originally a Canadian. He had been born in a different country and I didn't ask him which that was, but he had difficulty in expressing himself so I went to talk to him. As I discussed this with him, I asked him: how was your crop this year? He said it was terrible. He said, yeah, it was really bad. Okay, fine. What should we do? Well, we should have some money to help us out. I said: what was your crop like last year? He said: 35 bushels to the acre. He lives to the south-west of Bengough nine miles — nine miles.

That's the kind of help that some of these people opposite want to have. They want to pay each one of those guys \$50 an acre and that's where the problem comes. I want to just outline to you some of the programs that we have in our government placed before the people of Saskatchewan that are going to help.

Number one, and I believe this is going to be an asset to every one of my constituents where the 6 per cent on \$25 an acre is going to be an excellent asset, as a cash advance to these people in my constituency. I believe that and I want to reiterate what the member for Regina Rosemont said: it's fair; it's fair.

The other thing that I have in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, is the oil patch. I have oil; I have natural gas. And in that structure, with the oil royalties coming in, there are advantages to the farmers in my constituency who have an opportunity to: (1) work with oil; (2) an opportunity to invest in oil; (3) they have an opportunity to have their young people work both on the oil patch and on the farm. And they like that. They like that a lot and that opportunity is not only to those people who own the land there.

Those people who own the land there, Mr. Speaker, receive on an average \$2,000 for every pump jack that is on their property. Do they like that? Yes they do. They like it. They occasionally have a problem or two that they work out with the arbitration board, with the Minister of Energy. They work that out — \$2,000 for every pump jack on that quarter section. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, that's an asset. Some of those people tell me that for that quarter that they have bought, where there's four pump jacks on it, it's making the payments.

Now we want to talk about fairness. Let's take some of that oil money and put it back into agriculture. That's what the Minister of Agriculture is proposing to do in his Bill, and I think it's very, very important.

You go back and talk about our Farm Purchase Program. Farm Purchase Program has done an awful lot for this province. The Farm Purchase Program has provided half a billion dollars worth of financing through the agencies of the credit unions, the banks, the Farm Credit Corporation, to provide low interest loans to farmers who are very much in need of it — instead of buying the land.

As the government we have said, okay, the farmer's going to own the land. Those 4,500 to 5,000 farmers are new farmers coming in to the scope of the agricultural sector. The members opposite are saying that, where's the doom and gloom of agriculture? It's tough out there. That's number one. But the farmers have guts, Mr. Speaker; they've got lots, and they're prepared to place their ambition, their security, their drive, their initiative, on the line and say, go for it. That's why, when I represent them in the Morse constituency, I'm proud to represent them. They do have that quality.

I want to mention some things because the member opposite mentioned Farm Credit Corporation. I want to point out some things that are very significant — very significant. Farm Credit Corporation, in its report in this past nine months, have an average of 30 years where they have provided for loans in Saskatchewan. That's not bad. The NDP in Manitoba, their average age is 37. What are they doing to help their farmers?

(1645)

Another thing I want to point out — in the nine months Farm Credit has put into place 626 loans in Saskatchewan — 626 loans in Saskatchewan. That's very significant, because only 19 of those have been refinancing — 19 out of 626. Okay. Now let's just move one step further. In Manitoba there were 83 loans done in the nine months, and 45 of them were refinancing — 45 out of 83, and we had 19 out of over 600. And I say that that's a direct relationship to the kinds of things that we are doing in our agriculture policy that relate to good, honest, down-to-earth fairness type of policies — Farm Purchase Program, and I can list a number of others.

I want to go on to something else. That's refinancing, and these are as of September, these figures, so you can take that as a lesson in digging up some of your statistics.

Arrears in Saskatchewan, the borrowers bankrupt in Saskatchewan in the past 18 months in Farm Credit Corporations, bankruptcies in Saskatchewan farms through Farm Credit Corporation in the last 18 months, zero. Zero! What are those in Manitoba? Eleven. Zero in Saskatchewan. Canadian farmers bankrupt in the last nine months in Saskatchewan through all lending agencies is down this year over last year. And what does that prove? That proves that our safety net that our Minister of Agriculture is providing for the people of Saskatchewan is starting to work.

It took three years for us to get that interest rate that you subjected the farmers of Saskatchewan to, the mortgagees in this province, in late '79, and '80 and '81. It took three years to bring that back down so these farmers are beginning to realize.

Here's another statistic that you can bear in mind. You guys had 1,000 farmers per year in every year you were in business go out of business. A thousand in Saskatchewan. What has happened in the last three years or the last four years is 1,600. The last four years we've had 400 on an average a year and I

think, Mr. Speaker, that again exemplifies the kind of agriculture policies we are prepared to undertake and develop as it relates to our Minister of Agriculture speaking out on agriculture.

What gives us the right to talk about agriculture in Halifax, Mr. Speaker? It's those kinds of programs, those kinds of emphasis and I think, Mr. Speaker, I want, as the MLA for Morse, to conduct myself and provide for my constituents an avenue to protect them, to give them an economic advantage over the people of other countries. And I'm prepared to suggest to you and to this legislature that we are doing just that.

We're not done yet, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue to work to provide the farmers in the South with the kind of agriculture programs that the whole province can be proud of and we're not going to do it for one sector of agriculture, we're doing it for all sectors, whether it's grain, whether it's beef, whether it's dairy, hogs, or any of them. We're prepared to do that.

And I think our Premier and our Minister of Agriculture are doing an excellent job for us in speaking out for us in Halifax these days. Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. HODGINS: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise on this motion. As I review this motion I take note that a good portion of it deals with recognizing the grave agricultural crisis and recognizing the responsibility of the government. I don't believe that it takes any genius to really see that there is indeed a very, very grave crisis in agriculture today. I suppose it becomes a question of not only recognizing it, but what can be done about it; or perhaps, more importantly, what should have been done about it a number of years ago.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the members opposite for bringing up this very, very important subject. But I would also like to very much condemn them for having the audacity to infer that our government, in the past, has done little or nothing to help agriculture or is doing nothing today. I condemn them for the audacity to suggest that.

And, Mr. Speaker, to prove beyond a question of a doubt what our government has done in the past, it is very much my pleasure here this afternoon to review some of the policies and some of the programs that our government has administered over the last three and a half years.

Let us start, Mr. Speaker, with probably one of the highest costs that a farmer incurs in his agricultural operation today. That, without question, is the long-term debt on farm land — one of the highest costs that he has, long-term debt on farm land.

What did the former administration do about that long-term debt, and especially when interest rates back in 1980 and 1981 were 18, 19, 20 per cent? What did the former administration do, Mr. Speaker? As I recall it — correct me if I'm wrong — but as I recall it, they did absolutely nothing.

What did our government do, Mr. Speaker? We introduced a Farm Purchase Program that unequivocally, without question, has been highly successful. Five thousand young farmers or better have benefited from that program. The average annual subsidy per farmer would average \$4,500.

Mr. Speaker, this is significant. The only program that I recall that supposedly competes with that would be the former administration's land bank program. All that program did was artificially increase the price of farm land and it stole from that farmer probably the biggest retirement savings program that he had, and that was in the capital appreciation of his farm land. They took that right away from him, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, I see that every day. I speak with farmers when they near their age of retirement, when they sell their farms, and I talk to them about how much money they've had over their farming years. Most of them live rather meagrely. But when they sell that farm land, that represents a lifetime culmination of earnings. And the federal government that sits in Ottawa today has removed any

capital gains tax on the sale of that farm land, and, Mr. Speaker, that is a significant savings to the farmers of western Canada.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. HODGINS: — There are lists, Mr. Speaker — I have them here before me — of many, many programs our government has introduced. Let's talk for just a moment of the counselling and assistance program that helped the farmers with their input cost. I believe it started in 1984. The government of this day has committed some \$200 million in loan guarantees to this program.

And I recall, Mr. Speaker, I recall the look on a constituent of mine's face when he walked into my office and he told me in great detail of the financial troubles that he was having. He showed me his income statements; he showed me his bank balances. And I thought it was viable but I was certainly not an expert on it, but the banker would not lend him any money. The banker was a little shaky. So I recommended to my constituent, I says, take advantage of this program; this is designed specifically for people like you.

Well, Mr. Speaker, he applied for a program. The counsellors came out and visited with him at the kitchen table with him and his wife. Three weeks later, Mr. Speaker, I indeed remember the look on the man's face when he came in and says, thank goodness. He said, my loan guarantee has been approved.

Now my friends on the other side of the House would say that we have done nothing for farmers, Well Mr. Speaker, I challenge any one of the members opposite to go and visit that particular constituent and ask him his feelings on what this government did for him, his family, and his farm.

Other programs, Mr. Speaker — the natural gas program. That particular program has brought natural gas to, I believe, some 6,000 rural customers. And I think it's especially important to talk about that program today, Mr. Speaker, especially in light of the problems that we have had in northern Saskatchewan this year with drying our grains.

And, Mr. Speaker, you ask the people in northern Saskatchewan who are running their grain dryers right here this afternoon; and I'll bet there's probably 3 or 400 of them running their grain dryers this afternoon that are being powered by natural gas.

AN HON. MEMBER: — A tremendous savings.

MR. HODGINS: — A tremendous savings is correct. And, Mr. Speaker, you ask those farmers what this government has done for them and their farms.

Recently, I understand as well, the federal government has announced a program of, I believe it's a \$3,000 cash advance to further assist those farmers in drying their grain. And I recall again, Mr. Speaker, one of the constituents that came to my office just the other day. He came into my office and he says, 'Grant,' he says, 'I just finished paying my propane bill for drying grain.' He had paid \$15,000 to date for propane to dry his grain. Unfortunately, he was not one of the ones that could take advantage of the natural gas program. Not yesterday and not today, but the commitment was made, Mr. Speaker, for that to be an ongoing program. Maybe next year or the year after, that farmer will no longer pay \$15,000 for propane to dry his grain. There will be a tremendous saving.

In the light of this, the \$3,000 cash advance program on drying his grains, perhaps that man was not quite finished drying. Perhaps he needed a little bit of extra money to buy that propane or natural gas, and here again friends in Ottawa have come through with a program for that drying of grains.

I look at it, Mr. Speaker, and some governments delay and review and wait until there's a major crisis. I want to commend this government and the federal government for their immediate response to a very, very significant short-term problem.

Let's look at something else, Mr. Speaker, that is very, very newsworthy. It's come out, I believe, just in the last few days. Our government has announced a repayable cash operating loan of \$25 per cultivated acre. And that is a universal program to all farmers, Mr. Speaker. If you take an average sized farm back home, some 1,000 or 1,200 acres, you're looking at a \$30,000 cash repayable loan at 6 per cent interest. If you calculate that out on average interest rates of today, that would represent a saving of some \$1,800 in interest alone. And now we're speaking of \$1,800 savings in interest on this, \$4,500 saving on the 8 per cent Farm Purchase Program. For one young farmer alone there's probably \$7,000 or the better part thereof.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, let's look at another large input cost that my farmer friends have today, and that is, without question, the cost of fuel. Here again today this government, Mr. Speaker, has announced a program to rebate to the farmer 21 cents per gallon on their diesel fuel costs. Mr. Speaker, I probably deal on a person-to-person basis with more farmers than anyone in this room. And, Mr. Speaker, if there's one thing that they did not like spending so much money on, it was the costs of fuel, because the major costs in fuel have been taxes. And, Mr. Speaker, it is very much with pride, very much with pride, that I announced to my farmer friends that 21 cents a gallon on their diesel fuel purchases will be knocked off in very, very short order. I'm proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

MR. HODGINS: — Now the question, Mr. Speaker, would be: where does that money come from? Well, I'll tell you where it comes from, my friend. It comes directly from the oil patch — the dirty oil patch. Mr. Speaker, those people on the other side of the House would have that oil patch shut down. It would not be working one bit; the pump jacks would be standing still.

Well we, Mr. Speaker — and I will commend my friend, the Minister of Energy. My friend here has got the pump jacks booming. He's got the oil revenues coming in. And where's that money going? It's going to the farmers of this province where it belongs. And I commend the minister for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: — Hear, hear!

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.