

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I again today have petitions with respect to SaskPower, and I'll read the prayer quickly:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

Mr. Speaker, these petitioners come from the Gronlid, Choiceland areas of the province; Regina, Birch Hills — basically from all over Saskatchewan. I'm pleased to present them on their behalf today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too have petitions to present today. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates until a three-party utility review committee is in place in order to debate, review, and revise any utility rate increases in the future in order to restore fairness to the utility rate process in the province of Saskatchewan.

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

These petitions come from the Biggar, Fort Qu'Appelle, Wood Mountain, Regina, Scout Lake, Assiniboia, Cut Knife, Fir Mountain — across the province, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present them on behalf of the people today.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition. This petition is signed by many individuals from the Assiniboine Valley Health District, specifically in the Kamsack area, and the prayer that they have to the Assembly is:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to order a moratorium on hospital and nursing home closures until after an election for a new board can be held; and further that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to ensure the strategic plan is withdrawn and that a new plan be developed by the new board through widespread grass roots consultation.

I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition

relating to firearm ownership. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to unequivocally oppose changes to present legislation regarding firearm ownership and instead urge the federal government to deal with the criminal use of firearms by imposing stiffer penalties on abusers, recognizing that gun control and crime control are not synonymous, and allowing provinces to deal with gun control legislation on a provincial basis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

And these come from places such as Weyburn, Imperial, Radville, Kerrobert, Tribune. Thank you.

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that has not yet been presented to the Assembly during this session. So I'll just read the prayer, because it is self-explanatory:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to allocate adequate funding dedicated toward the double-laning of Highway No. 1; and further, that the Government of Saskatchewan direct any monies available from federal infrastructure programs toward double-laning Highway No. 1, rather than allocating these funds toward capital construction projections in the province.

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

From the town of Consul and Vidora and surrounding area. I'm happy to present these, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

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

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to reverse the decision to raise SaskPower rates and freeze any further utility rates; and

Of citizens of the province petitioning the Assembly to immediately repeal the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Thursday next ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Health, regarding health district boards across the province. According to the Provincial Auditor's audited statements of each health board: how many health district boards ran deficits in the '94-95 fiscal year; according to the Provincial Auditor's figures, how many health districts ran deficits in the

'93-94 fiscal year; how many health districts expect to run deficits in the '96-97 fiscal year; and do you plan to honour the former Health minister's commitment to provide our caucus copies of the Provincial Auditor's audited statements for each health district?

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Thursday next ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for the Provincial Secretary, regarding the former employee, Ms. Chandra Prasad: why did Ms. Chandra Prasad receive a severance of \$25,900 after resigning from the position of junior protocol officer after working for the Provincial Secretary's office for nine months; who approved Ms. Prasad's severance; and what formula was used to determine the amount of severance received by Ms. Prasad?

I so present.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members in the Assembly 51 grade 4 students sitting in your Speaker's gallery, and some members behind the bar.

Mr. Speaker, they're here this afternoon with teachers Ms. Betty-Ann Faber and Ms. Joli Bauer who were kind enough to invite me to the school to talk with the students about governance, about party philosophy, and I know that they are looking at the systems of government in their studies in school. I have hanging above my desk in my office a wonderful thank-you decoration that was sent after my visit and I was able to receive a wonderful pin. I'm not going to point that out as I know we're not to do that today, but they'll know where that's located.

We'll be meeting after their tour in room 218 and sharing refreshments and I'll be able to answer their questions about what they observed today. I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming the students from St. Marguerite Bourgeoys.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce guests sitting in your gallery. Fred Heron, general secretary of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, and joining him this afternoon is Derwyn Crozier-Smith, assistant general secretary. I'd like to welcome these two gentlemen to our legislature and I hope they enjoy the proceedings.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus, I too would like to welcome here Mr. Fred Heron, executive director of the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation) — I've worked with him in the past; we understand each other quite well — and Derwyn

Crozier-Smith as well. I hope you enjoy this time in the House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, some guests from my constituency. We have with us the president of the Humboldt constituency, Liberal Humboldt constituency, my daughter Nicole Julé, and my husband Robert Julé. Please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you not two very fine gentlemen from the STF, but two very fine constituents from Saskatoon Southeast, Mr. Fred Herron and Mr. Derwyn Crozier-Smith.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislative Assembly, two gentlemen seated in your gallery. They are Bert Ottenson of the sheet metal workers' union and John McLeod of the construction labourers' union. Gentlemen, welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National Engineering Week

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in recognition of National Engineering Week, which runs from March 2 to 9. Mr. Speaker, much like your job, when an engineer does his job correctly, it goes virtually unnoticed.

Professional engineers have a role to play in just about everything we do in this world. Engineers plan; they design and build the highways on which we drive. They envision, invent, and design the equipment we use on our farms and the cars that we drive. The technology these people come up with helps us all build a better province and a better country. They build our bridges and our office buildings. Engineers design safe systems for the delivery of drinking water to our homes, schools, businesses, and hospitals.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't also take this opportunity to point out that this province . . . in this province, we have one of the best engineering programs in the country. The University of Saskatchewan School of Engineering year in and year out is classed amongst the best training facilities in all of North America. Like everything else, this proves we in Saskatchewan have much to provide to the rest of the world in terms of technology. When these students graduate, they join the great ranks of engineers throughout the country and the world.

Mr. Speaker, I am not schooled in engineering. There are better people in this House to speak on the subject. Perhaps the

Leader of the Third Party could engineer a comment on this subject, but perhaps not. Nevertheless, I'd like to offer congratulations to all the professional engineers who have such a profound impact on all our lives.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan's Film Industry

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week in Santa Monica, California, the American film market is holding its annual trade show. This is one of the world's leading shows in markets of its kind. Attracting over a thousand delegates, it gives exhibitors a venue to display their wares. And, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is there.

Today SaskFILM is hosting a reception which will allow 16 Saskatchewan industry representatives to meet with producers, present Saskatchewan's attractions to the industry, and show good cause for more movie business being done here.

The film industry in Saskatchewan is expanding. And whether that's because of the movie star looks of our Premier or the star-studded cast in our cabinet, the fact is that the combined efforts of government and industry are paying off. Last year production levels reached \$15 million, generated an economic impact of \$48 million, and created 581 jobs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, we plan to build on this success through the many cooperative initiatives for the film industry which are in the *Partnership for Growth*, including a cultural industries development strategy, a new media business plan, and a joint partnership to establish a new sound stage facility in Saskatchewan. That's good news for the industry, it's good news for the economy, and it is good news for those of us who like to eat popcorn.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Winter Games

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, on Thursday February 29, the communities of Tisdale, Star City, and Melfort rolled out the red carpet for the site selection committee for the 1998 Saskatchewan Winter Games. The selection committee was visiting the communities who are bidding for the 1998 Winter Games to determine which bid will be best suited to host these games.

In a wonderful spirit of cooperation, these three communities are presenting a joint bid for these games. The combined resources of volunteers and facilities will create a much stronger bid than any other individual effort. It was fantastic to see Highway 3 from Melfort to Tisdale blitzed by yellow, blue, and green signs proclaiming Highway 1998.

The selection committee will make their choice sometime in May. If community spirit, excitement, and facilities sway the vote, then I assure you that the people of Melfort, Tisdale, Star

City and the Wapiti Valley ski resort will host the 1998 Saskatchewan Winter Games.

I ask this Assembly to join me in congratulating them for this great effort.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Meadow Lake Tribal Council and Nicaraguan Natives Sign Agreement

Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Something quite remarkable is taking place, starting in my constituency and stretching actually to the coast of Nicaragua in Central America — remarkable and ironic in a very pleasant sort of a way.

The Meadow Lake Tribal Council is a political and corporate organization representing thousands of Cree and Dene people. The council has become one of the most active and successful entrepreneurial groups in Canada. Chief Richard Gladue and the council are taking their expertise and experience to the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua.

Our first nations people know something of exploitation, having experienced it firsthand. Now instead of doing what was done to them, they are giving a hand to a people who have had their own brush with exploitation. This is what I meant when I said pleasantly ironic.

Last month, the MLTC (Meadow Lake Tribal Council) and the Miskito Indians signed an agreement in principle to study the feasibility of joint venture opportunities in forestry, mining, oil, and natural gas. This is a first for Canada and quite possibly for the world, Mr. Speaker — the first international agreement by two first nations organizations.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Chief Richard Gladue and the tribal council for their business acumen and for their eagerness to help the Miskitos in their own efforts to establish themselves. I should also mention that the Minister of Economic Development was present at the signing at the request of the tribal council. This gave him the opportunity to discuss other opportunities for Saskatchewan in the Central American region.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that through the efforts of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, a part of the Americas is being rediscovered — another very pleasant irony. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Saskatchewan Highways

Mr. Goohsen: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the number of accidents on Saskatchewan highways was reported. It is important to note that while the number of overall accidents has declined, I'm sorry to say that the number of fatalities in our province has risen above the five-year average.

Mr. Speaker, as a rural MLA (Member of the Legislative

Assembly) who travels for eight hours on our provincial highways to and from the legislature numerous times each month, I know firsthand what the condition of our highways . . . and what it is, and they're not very good. In fact I can foresee increased accidents and fatalities in 1996 because of the horrible condition of our highways. Two individuals were killed in my constituency last week, and we offer our condolences.

Mr. Speaker, Regina's mayor has called for the twinning of the No. 1 Highway for financial reasons. I believe that it must be done for safety reasons. There is no dollar value on human life, Mr. Speaker. And there is no other solution to address this problem than making our provincial highways safe again by repairing them. I urge the government to heed the advice of the Canadian Automobile Association — the CAA — municipalities, our caucus, and several other organizations that have brought this issue to the attention of the government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Rising Gas Prices

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You may remember a statement I made last April concerning rising gasoline prices in the city of Regina. A year ago gas prices jumped by 3 cents a litre overnight, and motorists were mad as heck. Well, Mr. Speaker, I get a sense of *déjà vu* because once again gas prices have jumped overnight by 3 cents a litre in Regina.

Saskatchewan produces a significant percentage of the country's oil and yet our province has some of the highest prices in Canada for gasoline. For a long time motorists have been trying to find out the reason for these gas price changes and motorists want answers.

On Monday, Regina Member of Parliament member, John Solomon, introduced a private members' Bill in the House of Commons to set up a national energy price review commission. It makes sense to work for a solution to the problem rather than simply blaming someone.

We've learned in the past that blame alone will get us nowhere, Mr. Speaker. Action speaks louder than words, and it is action that is needed on this matter, which begs for some answers. Perhaps the issue of rising gasoline prices will finally receive the attention it deserves and maybe it won't. But wouldn't it be nice if in the future I could stand up in this House and report that Regina motorists' concerns have been answered?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Bruno Train Derailment

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my concern for the families near my home town of Bruno who faced danger after yesterday's train derailment. This accident saw six cars jump the tracks and a few contained potentially explosive material; reports state there are butane leaks. Bruno is my home town and I know the families who are in danger, and I have taught at the school that was shut down as a precautionary measure.

I trust the government is assisting the emergency clean-up operation in every way possible. It is my hope that all precautions are being taken to alleviate any harmful impact on the environment. I would like CN (Canadian National) officials to take a close look at the cause of the derailment, and several others that have occurred recently. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Corporation Tax Cuts

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, this government is telling the public the cupboard is bare. They tell the people of Saskatchewan that they're going to break every promise in their book and cut our programs. While saying this, Mr. Speaker, the latest set of *Public Accounts* reveal this government is giving larger and larger tax breaks to Husky Oil. Will the Premier explain how he can justify offering more and more give-aways to a wealthy corporation when he is threatening cuts for the rest of us?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question, but I think he really has in mind the Liberal campaign promise when he talks about broken promises. I think it was broken from the very day that it was announced. You're not talking about our promises. Our promise is a promise which is geared on building for the future and rebuilding the province of Saskatchewan, preparing it for the 21st century. That means job opportunities. That means educational reform. It means local governments reform. It means social services reform. It means moving forward in a progressive and positive way.

Now with respect to the Bi-Provincial project, which you're referring to, this is something which we inherited from the former administration, and I might add, have taken a number of steps to strengthen the fiscal position and the economic viability of this operation in concert with our partners, Husky.

This is an inherited one, and I think it has the potential, with a little bit of management and good luck, to still be a profitable one in the interest of the people in the province of Saskatchewan.

If the hon. member from Thunder Creek was less worried about destroying and bringing down business, and was more concerned about positively being constructive, about building up business, we'd all be better off in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, need I remind this Premier, two weeks ago you condemned offering tax breaks to rich corporations in your province-wide address. Today we find that this government is more than doubling the tax holiday offered to Husky. Their tax give-away has gone from \$3.6 million to

\$8.4 million all at the expense of the rest of us.

Will the Premier admit this government has two standards: less for the rest of us and more for the rich?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: —Mr. Speaker, it there is a double standard anywhere it is in the Liberal Party — a double standard which, when you talk about tax fairness, I wish you would give that speech not to this House but give it to your cousins in Ottawa about tax fairness.

Ask them where they stand on the GST (goods and services tax). Remember that promise about the GST, they were going to do away with it? And just make sure that tomorrow's budget with your Liberal cousins isn't one which has something like the GST but renamed.

Ask your federal cousins to develop a set of taxation policies for all Canadians which are fair and are comprehensive, and not full of loopholes for the rich banks of this world, and a lot of your corporate friends to be able to make huge, huge profits while destroying people and laying them off.

Please don't get up in this House and lecture us about what I think is a fair taxation policy given the parameters of the federal government's inactivity. Tell the story where it should be told — to the Liberals — to the men and women of your party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I know I heard the Premier earlier say he couldn't get out of this deal of giving a tax break to a rich corporation. Might I remind the Premier that this government thinks nothing of breaking contracts and promises with this province's farmers.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain how he can break contracts with these Saskatchewan people yet he can't find a way to get us out of a deal that's making the rich richer every year.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I might say with the most respect that I can muster for the hon. member opposite that this question is absolutely ludicrous. There is an investment in Bi-Provincial in the order, generally speaking, of about \$270 million of taxpayers' money. We didn't make that investment; it was made by the Conservatives when they were in government. That is what we inherited and what we managed and what we are continuing to manage.

There is an investment, which is in the interest of the taxpayers, that requires careful, proper, sound, prudent business decision-making. If you had the responsibility of sitting in the treasury benches, which I doubt that you will ever have, you too would have, I hope, that kind of an approach when it comes to this particular issue.

So don't over simplify issues in the issue, as you describe it, of breaking some contracts here and not breaking other contracts there. That is absolutely off the mark. And I'm saying to the member opposite look, the agenda for this government and for this province is building and preparing for the 21st century. It's an agenda of hope and opportunity and prosperity. Come and join us in moving in that progressive direction and don't be a part of the doom and gloom gang.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, I would say that the Premier's being a little presumptuous in suggesting who may be sitting across the floor in a few years from now.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the government that the amount of money they are now giving Husky could help to stop this government's cuts to rural programs and almost would be enough to keep the Plains hospital open. How can the Premier possibly justify giving the 141st largest corporation in Canada tax give-aways when he and his government are closing hospitals and threatening cuts to education and our rural services?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the question is in that statement. But on the assumption that it was not an exclamation mark but a question mark at the end, I would begin by saying to the hon. member first that before he does assume to be able to run a government, the first thing that he and his colleagues should learn is how to run a political party responsibly and fairly — something which sadly they have not been able to yet demonstrate to people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Look, I say to the hon. member opposite — and he'll know as this session goes on in the next three, four years and wait till the budget — that the policy of this government is to build for the future of the province of Saskatchewan, to have no province bypass Saskatchewan, that we do it in a positive and a progressive way, that we honour our values of community and of sharing and of opportunity, that we provide as much hope as we can.

We need to do much more. I understand that. We've done much more. This is the policy that we take. It is not good enough for the hon. member opposite to try to take some figures out of context, out of the factual basis, and work it on the basis of attacking. That — I'm afraid to say — is the approach of the member from Shaunavon. It should not be your approach as a rookie member of the House. And if I may so to the other members of the Liberal caucus, it should not be their approach either. Reject the Shaunavon direction in this regard.

The Speaker: — Order, order. Next question.

Mr. Aldridge: — Mr. Speaker, it seems the Premier spends a lot of time worrying about our shop over here. I think he should worry about somebody in the back benches.

Mr. Speaker, on the first day of the 1991 election, the Premier made the following remark about the previous Conservative administration, and I'll quote:

When people are starving in many areas, when local businesses are having difficult times trying to keep things afloat, our government is pumping this kind of money into these large corporations.

Mr. Speaker, people are still going to food banks. We still have child poverty in this province. Businesses are still going through a hard time. Will the Premier explain how he can justify giving one of the largest corporations in this country this kind of a give-away when his government still hasn't eased the problems of the average person?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Well, Mr. Speaker, this is again the same question restated in different words that the hon. member asked me at the beginning of a question period. And I don't know how much more I can answer to him other than to say that I'm assuming that the Liberal Party in the province of Saskatchewan is . . . that there should be no tax breaks for business, no tax breaks to support business, or no tax breaks generally. I guess that's your position.

It wasn't what you campaigned upon. You campaigned upon reducing the sales tax to 7, and I think it was down to 5. The business tax was to be reduced. All of that's right out the window now — what you campaigned upon. And if that's what the Liberal member is saying is the position of the provincial Liberals in the province of Saskatchewan, so let the word go forward to the small-business community and to the entrepreneurs and the people in the province of Saskatchewan.

I want to close, Mr. Speaker, on this answer by saying that the Liberal Party is doing more to harm the aspect of investment and growth and opportunity by their constant doom and gloom — when the facts don't support it — that that member and each and every one of the Liberal members of caucus propagate in the province of Saskatchewan wrongly and incorrectly.

Please, get on with the agenda of building for the future. Let's build for that hope and prosperity. Let's be progressive; and let's not be totally negative all the time.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Job Creation

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Economic Development. Well, Mr. Minister, another day, another round of lay-offs in NDP (New Democratic Party) Saskatchewan. Sixty dairy workers have now lost their jobs at Agrifoods International. That brings the total to about 450 lay-offs in the last couple of weeks.

And worst of all, there is no good news for these people about any job creation strategy in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the throne speech promised jobs, jobs, jobs. But all we have seen

so far is lay-offs, lay-offs and more lay-offs. Well, Mr. Minister, where are all the jobs? Where are all the new jobs you promised, and where is the hope for those 450 people who've been laid off in recent weeks?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, the member, as yesterday, comes to the House and indicates that some companies are downsizing and changing their structure. And obviously as the economy changes and we move towards the next century, that in fact he will be able to come here probably every day and talk about companies that are changing, some that will be downsizing.

And obviously I will be able to get up and talk about: shuttle craft sets global course; and the Farm and Garden Centre, 20 years and still growing; Saskatoon International Road Dynamics, 41 per cent increase in sales and many more jobs; Microgro, a new company, the only greenhouse in Canada doing micropropagation for ornamental horticulture; Thomson Meats, here's an article: this year's sales' budget has increased by 230 per cent — products going to Japan, Korea, United States; SED Systems manufacturing a radar component that's going into armoured vehicles around . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Next question.

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, and the net effect of all of what you are saying is, is that since January of '95 to January of '96, Saskatchewan lost 5,000 jobs, according to StatsCanada. From January '92 to January '96, there were about 3,000 jobs created in Saskatchewan, according to StatsCan.

During the exact same time frame in Alberta, there were 103,000 new jobs created. So there probably are jobs, Mr. Minister. So there probably are jobs for those people who've been laid off; unfortunately they're all in Alberta. That's where they are. Mr. Minister, when are you going to adopt some pre-employment policies like the ones our caucus has and will introduce? When are you going to start creating a positive job creation strategy in this province and some hope for those 450 people who have been laid off in the last couple of weeks?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, over the last few months we've had the opportunity to deal with literally hundreds of business people from across the province. And in conjunction with them, with the cooperative movement and many working people, they have endorsed *Partnership for Growth*, a document that lays the pathway for job creation and a changing economy that will continue on the path of creating employment. Since 1992 when we did a similar exercise known as *Partnership for Renewal*, 10,000 more people are working now than were in 1992 when we started out on this project.

And I want to indicate to the member opposite that when he was in government, his party was in government, in 1989, 18,000 people out-migrated from the province — 18,000 people. That was the result of their economic strategy.

An Hon. Member: — And they're still doing it.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — No, it is not 18,000. Last year the record had improved to 3,000.

So I want to say to the member opposite that Saskatchewan, in conjunction with the business community, has a design for economic development that stands in stark contrast to the lack of a policy that existed in the last term of your administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Potential Lay-offs at Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education. Madam Minister, we've been notified that in the next few days you'll be laying off a large number of people at the Wascana, Palliser, and Kelsey institutes. Can you confirm this, Madam Minister, and how many people will lose their jobs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Mitchell: — Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the information that the member gives. I doubt if it's true, because if it were true, I think I'd have been notified about it. But I will look into the matter and report back to the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Reorganization of Education

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, this one is for the Madam Minister of Education. You're presently meeting with school divisions across the province, talking about reforms your government plans to implement in the near future.

Madam Minister, people who attended these meetings have told us that you plan to create regional educational authorities, and these super-boards will govern K to 12, libraries, SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology), and regional colleges within a large district. People attending these meetings have told us that you plan to replace existing elected school board members with politically appointed super-board members.

Madam Minister, how can you possibly justify filling your super-education boards with political appointees that are not accountable to local communities or to local people and will have the power to tax? Super-board members will be accountable only to you. How can you justify this, Madam Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the hon. member.

As the public knows, the Government of Saskatchewan has undergone a major consultation process with the public in

preparation of moving our province into the 21st century, and we're looking forward to the future. We are not looking to the past, but we're looking forward to the future to ensure that our young people, our citizens, have access to the very best education and skills training program in order that we can meet the new realities of the 21st century.

I have had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to meet with school trustees from across the province, and there'll be many more meetings in order to consult with them on the future.

How do we reshape our education system in order to meet those new challenges? We are not saying, Mr. Speaker — just in deference to the member — we are not saying in any sense of the word that we are going to politically appointed boards. That is not the route that we're going to go. We are not going to be like Alberta, Ralph Klein's Alberta, PC; and we're not going the Liberal route in New Brunswick where they have just turned all teachers into provincial civil servants and will eliminate all school boards.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, for the Madam Minister. Having spent most of my life in this province's school system, the phrase "no taxation without representation" is well etched in my mind. I'm wondering, with these super-boards that will probably be appointed, because the health boards seem to be, do you also now propose therefore to remove school tax from property?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question. I have to tell you I'm surprised by the question. Given that this member has been involved in the school system in this province all of his life, he well knows that schools collect property taxes along with provincial grants. We fund the K to 12 system. No government, Mr. Speaker — and the member should know this — no government would move to take away the local board's ability to tax.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gross Revenue Insurance Plan Overpayments

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of farmers have sent GRIP (gross revenue insurance plan) wind-up bills into my office asking that I try and hold this government to its promise, a promise not to collect on these bills, Mr. Speaker. One Saskatchewan farmer who feels betrayed by this government writes, and I quote:

My biggest source of frustration and anger is the fact that the previous Agriculture minister, during last spring's election, promised that no farmer would have to repay any money to GRIP. The government sure changed its tune.

I'd like to table this, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Minister of Agriculture admit in this House that it was

his government that broke a contract — a promise to the Saskatchewan farmers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like you to tell the hon. member opposite that his questions the other day fizzled right out, and I think the same thing will happen today.

Mr. Speaker, the question that the hon. member asks again and again and again is whether this government is going to stop acting like a businesslike government and a business man running the Crop Insurance Corporation and either forgive interest or cancel bills. Well again the answer is no.

And I would like to just quote to the hon. member a little clipping from the *Fort Qu'Appelle Times* a few days ago. And it goes like this:

Will we ever be blessed by a day when our provincial Liberal Party — Saskatchewan's Official Opposition — doesn't crank up the "whine meter" one more decibel?

If what we've seen for the past couple months emanating out of the Regina office is any indication, we shouldn't be expecting the wailing and whimpering to cease any time in the foreseeable future.

The Liberals have taken the science of constructive criticism by an Opposition and have succeeded in debasing it into a daily or almost daily session of whine, whine, whine.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Next question.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Producers in this province feel betrayed and they are demanding answers. I would now like to quote from the same letter I referred to earlier, in which a farmer writes, and I quote:

I don't know who else to turn to for help as my resident MLA, the Minister of Agriculture, is part of the reason I'm in this mess in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, it has been clearly established that the Agriculture minister and this government broke its promise. Given this fact, can the minister comment on whether his government's ability to collect on these bills has been compromised?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I know it might be a surprise to the member opposite, but everybody in my constituency didn't vote for me. I just want to get that clear.

The answer is no; nothing has been compromised, nothing will be.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to finish off this letter talking about the Liberal position on the collection of the GRIP bills by one telling paragraph, last paragraph:

Party strategists have given the Liberal MLAs bad advice. Haven't they caught on that people want their politicians to do politics differently? Isn't that what provincial Liberals promised us they were going to do?

Well, Mr. Speaker, a little bit of hypocrisy here. And, Mr. Speaker, I'll just end off by saying that this opposition continues on this topic. I invite them to walk out the door today, go to the nearest crop insurance meeting that we're holding across this province — 10 of them — put forward their brilliant ideas for the future. We'll receive anything they might put forward, and let's build a good Crop Insurance Corporation for the farmers of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McLane: — The member opposite's comments are clearly an example of an insensitive big government, and that's what the people of this province dislike.

Mr. Speaker, last Friday this government refused an emergency debate of GRIP on this issue. When questioned by the media outside about this decision, the Minister of Agriculture responded by stating, let's get off this silliness of hey, you made a promise; you broke your promise.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister believe that bills, many of which are in the thousands of dollars and threaten the livelihood of many Saskatchewan farmers, is silliness?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I know what silliness is. I've witnessed it daily for the past four days from the members of the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member a question. February 7 or thereabouts there was a letter sent out from the federal government. The federal government sent out 1,300 letters to Saskatchewan farmers. Guess what they were doing?

An Hon. Member: — What?

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — They were collecting outstanding overpayments from the western grain stabilization accounts — your federal cousins — a little bit of a mixed message there. Mr. Speaker, so what the federal government is going to do, if you don't pay your outstanding overpayment from your federal WGSA (western grain stabilization account), then they're going to deduct it off the Crow benefit. You don't remember the Crow benefit? That's the \$320 million a year the Liberals have taken out of the farmers' pockets; that's the Crow benefit.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask the member to clarify. Please clarify . . .

An Hon. Member: — Send the bills in.

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — I will be more credible than to ask

farmers to send the bills in. But I would ask the Liberals to please clarify their position on this matter.

The Speaker: — Order. Last question.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many similarities between this government and the previous Conservative federal government which started that process. Mr. Speaker, because of promises made by this government, Saskatchewan farmers did not budget for this added expense. As a result of broken promises, many farm families cannot simply afford to carry this additional financial burden.

Can the Minister explain if he is aware of the term promissory estoppel and will he indicate whether it's applicable in this case.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Upshall: — Mr. Speaker, let me be serious for a moment. Farmers of this province understand the GRIP program very well. They understand as farmers they have to pay their bills, as they pay their fertilizer bill or their fuel bill or their pesticide bill; they have to pay bills.

They understand that the GRIP was an overpayment that was . . . that they were paid out, and because the grain prices went up they were in an overpayment situation. They understand that we deferred the premiums for 1994 but they didn't have to pay until the wind-down of the program.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Liberal Party is being very irresponsible by playing their silly politics with an important issue of bills that farmers know have to be paid back. They don't expect, nor should expect, to have that bill forgiven. But what we are doing in this government is trying to build a new, solid crop insurance foundation for the farmers of this province. We're having our meetings across this province; we'll continue to do that, and by 1997 we'll have a good, solid farm crop insurance program for the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 1 — An Act to provide for the Enforcement of the Code of Ethical Conduct for Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly (Anti-corruption)

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that a Bill to provide for the Enforcement of the Code of Ethical Conduct for Members of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly (Anti-corruption) be now introduced and read the first time.

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

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

Ms. Lorje: — I ask leave to make a statement of concern to

members.

The Speaker: — The hon. member from Saskatoon Southeast has request leave to make a statement of interest to members. Perhaps if you'd like to indicate the nature of that statement to members before they . . .

Ms. Lorje: — Condolences to a member in this House.

Leave granted.

CONDOLENCES

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All too often in this society we bear witness to tragedy in a workplace. And we know from looking at statistics that very frequently tragedy strikes in mining. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the members' attention to the fact that last week there was a tragic mining accident in Flin Flon, Manitoba. The funeral service will be held tomorrow for Mr. Richard Beasley.

I would like members to know that the member from Kelvington-Wadena will be leaving early today to attend the funeral for a member of her family. And it is imperative, I believe, in these turbulent times that we find it in our hearts to extend concern and sympathy across provincial borders and across political borders. I think it is also imperative that we pause to reflect on the waste of lives and the sadness for survivors of all people killed in workplace accidents.

So on behalf of the government members, and I believe on behalf of all members of this House, I extend our sympathy, concern, and condolences to the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Speaker, if I could have leave as well to express condolences.

Leave granted.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the member has just expressed certainly our concern and the fact that many of us as individuals over time certainly run into situations or come across situations where tragedies do strike. And while it's difficult to prevent some of the tragedies that happen, and my colleague the member from Maple Creek related one this afternoon that wasn't directly related to this House, but we certainly feel for the families involved.

And as an opposition caucus and as a third party caucus we express as well our condolences to the member from Kelvington-Wadena and trust that she will let her family members know and the family realize that the members of this Assembly are thinking of her at this time.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Murrell, seconded by Mr. Thomson, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Boyd.

Mr. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak before this Assembly for the first time. Like a lot of other first-time members in this Assembly, I have to admit that I wasn't always quite sure of what I'd set myself up for when I ran for office last June. I will refrain, though, from a lengthy dissertation on the characteristics of my constituency. Most of you that have had the opportunity to enjoy a holiday in northern Saskatchewan will have travelled through my constituency of Rosthern at some time. I will have to also say you probably drove on some very crowded highways that we hope will be alleviated some time soon. Aside from that experience, you know the good things that exist in the Sask valley area.

I want to start my remarks by reflecting some of the comments made by other members. As others have said, both in this session and throughout the history of this Assembly, fulfilling the role of a democratic representative of the people is a profound and a moving experience to anyone. Suddenly you have the awareness thrust onto you that you are no longer just speaking for yourself any more. Of course, we're all here because we are intensely concerned about the future of this province. And we all have our own ideas about which way to provide for that future.

Yet in many ways, you have to put your own ideas and beliefs on the back burner. It is not, after all, just the expression of what we 58 people think that makes this place a dynamic and important institution. Rather, it is the commitment that we all undertake to be honest brokers of the views of our constituents. In carrying out that duty, I feel that I'm assisted by a long history and the proud traditions that this Assembly boasts.

British-style parliamentary democracy is quite an awe-inspiring institution. It has evolved and grown over eight centuries. It has been exported to the four corners of the globe. It has become the standard of democratic government for cultures as diverse as the East Indian, the Australian, the Hong Kong Chinese, and of course, thankfully, our own. It is a tradition of flexible, adaptable, and yet effective government that deserves the deepest respect from all the members of this Assembly. And indeed from all members of our society.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you at this time on the position that you have. I appreciated it very much when you spoke with emotion in your acceptance speech, an emotion that we very often don't always contribute to this House. And I think this House could use much more of that.

I was somewhat awed shortly after the election when I drove through my constituency and suddenly realized that I was not just speaking for myself; I had the job of speaking for all those people in that constituency. And it's truly an awe-inspiring position and it is an awe-inspiring House and an awe-inspiring institution.

Today I wish that my parents were alive and in the gallery. They are not. I would like to give thanks to my wife and my family for the support that they give.

And I would like to give special thanks this time to my mother-in-law, Helen Fast. Mother-in-laws are traditionally the butt of many jokes. My mother-in-law is a very classy person. She is very politically astute and has always had much faith in my political activities. And so I appreciate her very much.

As a new member of the PC opposition caucus I have been assigned a number of critic duties and I would like at this time to share some of my thoughts on those ideas.

On the topic of municipal government, the provincial government has been floating some trial balloons that involve municipal amalgamation. These suggestions are, quite frankly, I believe, an insult to the good government that the people of Saskatchewan enjoy at the municipal level. The provincial government's approach to this is typical of the kind of heavy-handed centralism of which the members opposite are so justifiably infamous and, unfortunately, infamously proud.

We saw the fiasco of rural hospital closures and the government's attempt to dictate local changes in Regina led to insensitive and often irrational moves that left some communities over an hour's drive from adequate medical care.

The fact is that communities themselves will always be much more in touch with the grass roots needs and therefore are the best judges of where resources should be allocated and where efficiencies can be made.

When we talk about municipal politicians and leaders, we're not talking about a group of people who sequester themselves away in a marble palace once a year to make decisions. They make their decisions in the middle of the activity, in the middle of all the people whom they serve and who they tax.

The brave people who contribute their time to running our municipalities share their lives in every conceivable way with the people for whom they make decisions. Responsible government isn't just a theory to these people. If they mess up, they literally can't leave the house without hearing about it.

When you add to this a very important fact, that they all manage to run balanced budgets year in and year out in spite of overwhelming pressures from this government that have been placed on them, it is easy to see that municipal politicians deserve our deep respect. They certainly don't deserve to be lectured on how to manage their affairs or to be told what services or what administrative structures they should use.

For these reasons, our caucus, and myself personally, feel that

the top-down approach to municipal reform that this government seems to be favouring is dead wrong. I will grant you that there are too many overlapping municipal governments in this province, but the municipalities themselves are aware of this, and they are keenly aware of wasteful practices in their level of government, and they are most anxious and most capable to fix those problems.

It is my contention that our job on the provincial level is not to try to do the municipalities' jobs for them, but rather to get out of their way, clear out some of the red tape, and let them do what they know best.

Municipalities are at present cooperating in things from administration sharing to snow clearing. In my constituency they take many joint responsibilities where two or three or even more municipalities get together and share work. They share in fire protection. They share in garbage disposal. They share in libraries. They share EMOs (Emergency Measures Organization). They share in skating and curling rinks. They share in maintaining swimming pools. They share in golf courses. They share in the restoration of historical sites. We need to give them the options and then give them the choice on how to do it.

(1430)

The no-nonsense, no-sacred-cows approach of the municipal governments contrasts very sharply with the provincial government. As of the last budget, 12 out of 24 government departments are actually spending more than they were in 1991. The government on the whole was spending a quarter of a billion more than in 1991.

The bureaucratic empires in this city continue to spread with abandon and inevitably soak up more and more expensive office space as they go. The Premier himself holds on to his large cabinet. These are the people, Mr. Speaker, who are now going around presuming to tell municipalities how to amalgamate and how to cut back.

Again the key in fostering efficiency on the municipal level is simply to get out of the way and to make sure the path is cleared for those jurisdictions that want to amalgamate. One complaint on this score that I've noticed is the situation where a small community wanted to see all of their tax dollars go towards services rather than administrative costs. So consequently they tried to hand over both their tax revenue and their responsibilities to the RM (rural municipality). The RM refused. Mr. Speaker, we need to look at situations where when this amalgamation wants to occur, it can occur.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — But let's make sure we don't tell them when it occurs and to whom it occurs.

On the other side of the coin, Mr. Speaker, some municipalities may actually prefer to spend more money on administration than on services to people. That should be their choice; it is their choice and should remain so. Mr. Speaker, many people in

this province want their government to be close to them. In many ways and in many communities, this has been one of the strengths of Saskatchewan life, and they should have the right to spend their tax dollars on that particular option if they so choose. This entire issue of municipal reform comes down to a question of choices.

The government is trying to deprive local people of the decision-making powers, just as they did when they closed the rural hospitals and pushed through their model of district health boards. The PC caucus believes that local people should be given the freedom to exercise the good judgement that they have always demonstrated in these situations.

Another area that government has discussed with regards to amalgamation is the education sector. This is an area of special interest to me since I am the education critic for the caucus and more especially because of my personal background in this area.

In the area of educational administration, I think there is a much less effective cause to be made for any sort of amalgamation than in the municipal government level. Unlike municipalities, where there are substantial salary and office costs to consider, school districts have relatively few such costs and are already running pretty close to the bone. We know that the only real cuts in education is through school closures. These decisions need to be left to the elected.

I think it is significant that district school boards run their meetings on a per diem as low as \$10 per member per meeting. Yet we still seem to get very qualified people holding these offices, and we don't hear complaints about those people going broke while attending school board meetings. Compare this, Mr. Speaker, to a few of the boards and commissions that the government operates with per diems running into the hundreds of dollars.

Once again, as with municipalities, I think the provincial government can learn a lot about efficiency from the local level rather than the other way around. Given the fact that the administrative costs of school districts is already quite low, the only place you can realize substantial savings is closing schools. This isn't something I can personally advocate, and I think everyone in this Assembly realizes the kind of hardships that would come with a large round of school closures. I think the government and indeed the public at large is going to have to accept either something close to our current spending on the education system or some rather very serious pain.

School district amalgamation doesn't offer any magic solutions to this problem. This government has been busy backing away from commitment to increasing school funding. The only torch they seem to be prepared to hold out to education is the torch from Regina Dewdney.

I also feel that amalgamating school boards and school districts would be a mistake from another perspective. Currently elected school boards are very responsive and responsible to the local taxpayer. Because they are elected, they are the natural custodians of the local property tax level.

On the other hand, it has already been discussed that larger school district boards would need some tax powers to cover their areas of responsibility. These boards would be focused mainly on the voices of teachers and students in expressing their local educational needs. Of course these views are all very valid and necessary, but they often don't consider the ability of taxpayers to foot the bill. I would have very serious fears about a non-elected board having influence over taxes without the taxpayer having some influence over them.

On the subject of education funding, I had the pleasure last week of meeting with a delegation from the University of Saskatchewan Students Union. I was quite impressed about how realistic these students were about government funding and about the plans the government seems to have in mind for post-secondary education.

Obviously they are not happy about the prospect of further cuts. But instead of just sitting on their hands, they are trying to think of some solutions. They weren't looking for a free ride for themselves, nor were they in favour of the government providing an out-and-out bail-out to fix the University of Regina's debt problem. And I appreciate the minister's statement on that, that he wouldn't provide that sort of funding. The students should be commended for that position.

They brought something to my attention, an issue that I think it is important to mention here. In carrying out its assessment of the two universities, the government gives each university an equal per student grant. As these students pointed out, it is arbitrary and unfair to hand out a flat per head grant in this way. Each university has its specialities. And the fact that some colleges, like medicine for example, are much more expensive to run than courses that require nothing more than a professor and a few desks.

For this reason, they felt it would be fairer for everyone involved if the government assessed each university's needs on a cost-per-student basis and made its grants accordingly. I think that would be eminently fair. I would urge this Assembly to keep this concern in mind in our deliberation on education. I think the students had a good point on that issue.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I took my chair today without touching on something that is kind of a pet issue for me, namely health education in our schools. Our society is increasingly suffering from the effect of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies. The newspapers are covered with these kinds of information and they are usually quite disheartening.

These problems are obviously devastating to the lives they affect. They also cause a drain on our health and social service systems. Clearly the single most effective way of controlling these problems is by educating our young people about them. In accomplishing this task, we should not be depriving ourselves of any useful information or successful tactics that are available. Yet that is exactly what we are doing.

In spite of years of protest on this subject, the Saskatchewan education system refuses to include abstinence education as the

major part of the resources for health education. I'm sure most of you have heard of Teen Aid, the foremost group in the promotion of abstinence among teens. This group continues to be shut out of our schools for no particular reason. The message of Teen Aid is a pretty simple one. The only 100 per cent guarantee against sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy is abstinence. Last time I checked, that was pretty much the same kind of message that most parents in Saskatchewan give their kids at home. We're not talking about some radical new theory here. Nonetheless I am not saying that our school system should change its curriculum to suit Teen Aid's agenda.

However at present their simple message is not even allowed to be presented as an authorized option in our schools. They can bring in speakers from AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) organizations, speakers from gay and lesbian societies, but heaven forbid if they bring in too much Teen Aid. It is time our Department of Education sheds its virgin phobia and promotes chastity, not leaky prophylactics. What is perhaps the most galling about this situation is that Teen Aid, which I would say reflects the views of most Saskatchewan families, receives no funding from the government while other organizations, whose views are — to put it diplomatically — a little more alternative, receive thousands of dollars of grants.

I think it is important, as an issue of fairness, it should receive the same funding that other groups do, or all of these organizations should be cut off and left to fend for themselves through donations. In fact that last option might be preferable since it would give the education system a little more accurate barometer of which groups enjoy the support of the community.

Another topic that I feel I must say a few words about is that of the federal government's gun control legislation. I am a gun owner myself and it goes without saying that I am opposed to this federal law. I know that there is broad, all-party support for the fight against this legislation, so I don't feel that I need to spend a lot of time on arguments you've probably already heard and already understand.

Just to touch on them, Mr. Speaker. This Assembly should continue to consider issues like the cost of that program; the degree in which it attempts to impose an Eastern solution on what isn't even a problem in the West; the general ineffectiveness of such legislation, especially when many of those crimes, and probably most of them, are committed by knives and clubs and hands, not guns.

I would also like to add the comment, Mr. Speaker, that we should perhaps do a survey of violent crimes to see whether drugs or alcohol were the contributing factors. If this in fact proves to be the case, perhaps those are the areas where we need to be focusing our enforcement efforts.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close my remarks by repeating that I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to this Assembly. In spite of that attitude, I must say that I have great reservations about this government and the plan that they have outlined in their Speech from the Throne.

One of the main reasons that I sought to represent my

constituents in this Assembly is that I had the misfortune of witnessing on a daily basis the damage that this government has done to this province. Coming from a predominantly rural area, I have seen my friends and neighbours in my community suffer from the neglect of a government that has, from all evidence, just simply written off rural Saskatchewan.

Almost from its first days in office, this government has laid hardship after hardship on the shoulders of rural Saskatchewan. Things like ripping up GRIP contracts with 60,000 rural farmers in Saskatchewan; irrationally and insensitively shutting down 52 rural hospitals; increasing fees and taxes of all kinds; performing acts of back-door taxation through utility rate increases, as is most evident in the recent increase in SaskPower rates — increases which fell particularly hard on the shoulders of farmers and other rural residents.

Mr. Speaker, I could easily spend many hours listing the failures of this government. However, I want to address one issue in particular: the issue which led the Hon. Leader of the Third Party and myself to move the motion that is in front of us now. I'm referring of course to the claw-back of the GRIP overpayment.

Mr. Speaker, no one on either side of the House, at least not in the PC caucus, is suggesting that farmers shouldn't pay their bills. What we are saying, however, is that it is high time this government learned to keep its word to the farmers, especially about GRIP.

We saw in 1992 how lightly they regarded the binding contracts that had been signed with Saskatchewan farmers. Now we see how lightly they regard their own election promises. Of course the line that we are hearing out of the government these days is that there never was any election promise.

Well isn't that just a dandy little excuse in trying to rewrite history. Unfortunately for this government, the proof is in the June 3 edition of the *Leader-Post*. You can't get it much clearer than that statement. All the spin-doctoring in the world isn't going to get you out of that particular one.

Mr. Speaker, the actions of this government on the issue of GRIP represents the worst kind of cynical and manipulative election politics. Since we have seen that the members opposite never intended to keep their election promises, we really have to question the validity of the mandate that they received under those conditions.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to second the amendment to the Speech from the Throne. I urge the members of this Assembly to show that they hold to the proudest traditions of this House by voting for that amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1445)

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to

extend my congratulations on your election as Speaker of this House. I am positive that your impartiality, your humour, and your knowledge will serve this House very well in your new capacity. Already you have demonstrated your wisdom and your ability to make impartial decisions. I also remember your admonitions as caucus leader for the members to be pithy in their remarks. Mr. Speaker, I shall try to be pithy in my remarks today.

Also, congratulations to the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood in his election as Deputy Speaker. I don't think any of us will argue with him.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in this Assembly as a representative of the people in the constituency of Swift Current. This constituency has had a great representation by notable members. If we go back far enough, Harry Gibbs, a railway worker, E.I. Wood, a farmer and a former cabinet minister, and of course John Penner, Gentleman John, who represented this constituency during the last term and gave so much of himself in this great province.

He also gave me advice and encouragement once I decided to seek the nomination for the Swift Current constituency. Thank you, John, and now I know that the people of Swift Current constituency and the people of Saskatchewan appreciate all you did while an MLA and a minister of this government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — A few words with regards to the Swift Current constituency. The Swift Current constituency, after redistribution, runs from the beautiful South Saskatchewan River in the north to Lake Pelletier in the south, and includes the city of Swift Current and numerous villages, the largest being Stewart Valley in the north and Wymark in the south.

It is a diverse constituency and is rich in its cultural heritage. A large number of Norwegians in the north; Mennonites in the south who, by the way, originally settled on a reserve known as the Mennonite Reserve; and other numerous ethnic and religious groups which comprise the mosaic of Canada. The constituents are an industrious group, very progressive, very energetic, and very creative.

I must acknowledge the importance that my upbringing in a Mennonite household has had on my life. It is only after one reaches a certain stage in their life that one appreciates the hardship, the love, the commitment of one's parents. My parents were very frugal, looked after our needs, and always had that extra compassion, care, and concern for the less fortunate. Although not involved politically, their efforts centred around the church, and through this institution they were able to contribute to the welfare of their fellow man.

My mother taught her principles by the quiet, magnificent example of her own life, and the occasional stunning power of her simple words. And that is why I naturally gravitated towards a career of service, first as a teacher and then to politics, and especially the New Democratic Party, whose policies of compassion, care, and concern for their fellow man

greatly appeal to my sense of social justice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — That is why I decided to seek an election as an NDP — to strive to enhance the social programs so that they would not only be preserved but strengthened and expanded if necessary; a party concerned with the needs, dreams, and expectations of the people.

Mr. Speaker, what other political party, when organizing a fund-raising function, ask you to donate the food, then tells you to prepare it, then charges you for the meal, pleads, begs, and cajoles you for a donation, and then if there's some food left over they sell it back to you. A great bunch.

I'm proud to stand here today as a member of a government which is caring, compassionate, and concerned about the future of all the citizens in this province. Mr. Speaker, Swift Current has often been referred as one of the top 10 cities in Canada, and as Saskatchewan has been declared by the United Nations to be the best place in the world to live, it only follows that my constituency must be the greatest place in the whole wide world in which to live, and I heartily agree.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An Hon. Member: — And they have a good MLA too.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you. Agriculture plays a vital part in our economy. The farms in the south-west are becoming larger. They are diversifying. The growing of the cereal crops of course is foremost but the pulse crop and the exotic crops like canaryseed, thyme, safflower, all are part of the agricultural scene.

New, innovative machinery is manufactured in this area. Rem Manufacturing that sends agriculture implements and parts throughout the world is located here. Seventy-five-foot swathers are found in the fields. Agriculture has experienced a great year, and with diversification will become even more important in the future. Mr. Speaker, the new safety nets proposed by this government will only add to the quality of life in the rural areas.

Manufacturing is another major industry in this region — Spar Group, and all of you have probably found these products all across Canada; and Urban Forest Recyclers which supplies the U.S. (United States) market with egg crates. Mr. Speaker, thanks to the policies of this government, manufacturing has become a major partner in this constituency and this great province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk for a moment about our *Partnership for Growth*. You hear the word partnership a lot these days because quite frankly it only makes common sense to include all the sectors and facets of society in the decision-making process, and by working together we will build on the strengths of the citizens of Saskatchewan.

We demonstrated this through our extensive consultation process with the public right across the province. Ordinary citizens, farmers, business leaders, educators, students, and many others expressed their dreams, their visions, their hopes for the future. And most important of all, we listened.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — And that's how we create economic activity, new opportunities, and a positive business climate — by forging new partnerships. *Partnership For Growth* will help the economy prosper and create meaningful jobs.

Mr. Speaker, this government will, over the next term, reduce the number of regulations which impact small businesses. It is the responsibility of government to create a suitable climate for businesses, especially small businesses, because they are the ones who create the new jobs and we need to help them along. Compare our record of job creation with the federal Liberals.

We will also educate young people about the option of going into business for themselves and make regional economic development authorities, the REDAs, the focal point for their development in the communities.

I'm really excited about the entrepreneurial centre being developed in Swift Current. Through the REDA and the chamber of commerce, a partnership of educational leaders, business leaders, agricultural entrepreneurs, credit union representatives, government representatives, a centre is being organized to encourage and provide, young people particularly, an opportunity to focus their ambition on creating new businesses.

As our Deputy Premier expressed at a REDA meeting in Swift Current in early January, when we were young — that's only a short time ago for me; I'm not so sure about the Deputy Premier — we assumed we would be working for someone or some organization during our lifetime. Perhaps now we should be helping the younger generation to look at operating their own business. I look forward to great things from REDA and the entrepreneurial centres not only in the south-west, but in the province.

Mr. Speaker, the establishment of the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership Corporation will help increase trade. This is a major source of where Saskatchewan's economic growth will take place in the 21st century.

The local Urban Forest Recyclers Inc. is a great example of the value of exports. This company, located in Swift Current, is operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week; employs around 70 people and produces egg flats from recycled newspaper and exports almost all of it to areas in the United States. A super story.

Another great success story is T S Metals which just recently exported metal siding and corrugated roofs to — guess where? — to Japan and also to New Zealand.

Preliminary plans are being negotiated to bring in another

industry which will use local resources to manufacture a product which will be exported to other parts of Canada and the United States.

Mr. Speaker, another area that has excellent potential is the tourism sector. To create growth and increase job growth through *Partnership For Growth*, we will be developing a provincial tourism strategy. We as a province have so much to offer. And in the great south-west we have numerous bed and breakfast farms, dude ranches, superb fishing and water activities on the Saskatchewan River, historical settlements such as . . . (inaudible) . . . towns, the Mennonite village, and of course beautiful regional parks and superb golf courses.

Mr. Speaker, many of these were developed by the local people who saw a need and went out and did something about it. The good old Saskatchewan way — it's working.

I am very excited about the tourism strategy being developed to make people aware of the best place in the whole world to live. I ask all of you to be on the lookout for "See More Sights."

Mr. Speaker, many businesses in Saskatchewan are expanding and hiring additional employees because of the positive climate that has been created for doing business in this province.

Mr. Speaker, our government has a strong commitment in creating meaningful jobs for Saskatchewan people and providing for training for jobs of tomorrow. As mentioned by the member for Battleford-Cut Knife in her eloquent reply to the Speech from the Throne, 1995 was a good year. Retail sales jumped 5.1 per cent in the first nine months of 1995, surpassing the increase in the so-called tax-free Alberta.

Production of oil rose 8.4 per cent, evidenced by the tremendous activity in the oil patch around Swift Current and in the south-east. Production of gas rose over 9 per cent. The major grains, pulse crops, and speciality crops were harvested at a rate of 6 per cent higher than the 10-year average. And the employment rate remains the highest in all of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, Saskatchewan is considered the best place in the world to live, based on a United Nations index. The index defines quality of life by combining life expectancy, educational attainment, and gross domestic product adjusted for the cost of living. Not only is Saskatchewan the best place in the world to live but we consistently maintain one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. We accomplish this despite the federal offloading.

We were the first province to balance the budget and along comes Ottawa with a hundred million dollar shortfall in transfer payments. This federal money was destined for areas like health, education, and social programs, the very things the Saskatchewan citizens said were most important.

Despite all these cuts from Ottawa — and make no mistake about it, the cuts were deep — our government has a plan to cushion these Draconian cuts, a plan that is workable, that makes common sense, and responds to what the public is asking.

Mr. Speaker, concerning government spending, our government has shown positive leadership in this area. It's a fact, despite the naysayers, that our operating costs are already the lowest per capita in all of Canada. Clearly we are demonstrating that we can reduce spending and cut at the top and do so without dismantling the health, education, and social programs as the federal government is wanting to do.

Nearly 40 per cent cut in social program transfers over the next four-year period by the federal government. There's no talk of tax reform, no talk of Senate abolishment, or the elimination of tax breaks to large corporations. It doesn't require a rocket scientist to determine the Liberals' priorities.

During the last term, our government set out to improve and sustain the health benefits which we have come to accept as normal. The evolution of medicare to a model of wellness required firm and wise leadership and this was provided by our government led by our Premier.

The Swift Current constituency is proud to have been the forerunner of universal health care in Canada. During the '40s these people recognized a need, formed partnerships and created Health Region No. 1, a board which is still in existence and has come full circle. Mr. Frank Peters, who worked in the Health Region No. 1, now serves as a member of the Swift Current district health board, an example of the commitment of the people to necessary reform and the universality of health care.

Mr. Speaker, education has been part and parcel of all my life; first as a student, then as an educator and an administrator, and now as a member of a caucus committee whose one area of concern is education. Education has changed, just like everything else, and is changing, perhaps not as fast as some people would prefer but nevertheless changing.

I'm not as critical of our education system as some people are. More students are staying in school longer, are graduating with some powerful skills, and I do not believe that it is the fault of the education system alone when jobs are not available for the graduates. Corporations, society as a whole, and yes, even governments must shoulder some of the responsibility along with the schools.

If the member from Regina South is an example of our end product, our province is in good hands. I have interviewed hundreds of grade 12 graduates during the last few years and have been impressed by their skills, their confidence, their ambitions, and their optimism.

(1500)

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is need for change. Yes, there are people who have not received the full benefits of the educational system, and yes, changes will occur. That is why I'm pleased that our government, instead of following Ottawa's lead, instead of slashing the education transfers by millions of dollars, has promised to work with the educational leaders and the people of Saskatchewan to develop a system which will be fiscally responsible and provide the students with the tools

necessary to enter the 21st century.

I'm also very humble in considering the great trust and responsibility the people of Swift Current constituency have placed in me as an elected representative, and in the traditions of the MLAs of the past, I will serve them to the best of my ability.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take just a moment to reaffirm something you said in your opening remarks as Speaker. I believe they were timely and well chosen and I believe they speak to the source of our commitment as public servants. I too state categorically that the profession of democratic politics is a noble one. I believe that the desire to place one's beliefs, affiliations, and character before the public is a profoundly selfless act. Further, I believe that those who enter this profession are decent, dedicated, public-spirited women and men.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Aristotle said that the good of the people must be the goal of the science of politics. Perhaps some things have changed over the years, but that observation has not.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy for people to misjudge an institution by its dysfunctional parts; to denounce the group because of the actions of some individuals. That is an understandable reaction. I'm afraid that is what has happened to us — that the cynicism which the public seems to have for all politicians has been fuelled by the actions of a few, and also of course by the uncertainty we all feel as times change so rapidly around us.

If some elected members have lowered the standard, and unfortunately they have, Mr. Speaker, then it falls to the rest of us to do what we can to restore the dignity of our chosen profession — second profession for most of us — to its proper place in the mind of the voters. It seems to me that we do that by simply rolling up our sleeves and working as diligently as we can. Mr. Speaker, I know that you do that and I intend to follow your example.

John F. Kennedy once said that in his country every mother wanted her son to be president, but none wanted them to be politicians. Perhaps we can close that gap a little bit in our time here.

Mr. Speaker, I believe our government has a great plan for the future and I will certainly be supporting the motion. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, members of the legislature, esteemed guests and friends, it is an honour to offer my comments in response to the Speech from the Throne. I believe they will reflect what the majority of my constituents would say were they here today.

I would first like to offer my congratulations to all elected and re-elected members, and to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Deputy Speaker. You have been chosen to uphold the democratic traditions of the legislature and I respectfully join all members

in wishing you well. I would also like to acknowledge the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk, and staff of the Legislative Assembly, and thank them for their help in the past months.

It is a great privilege to be here representing the Humboldt constituency. It is located in central Saskatchewan and features several unique historic sites. Within the boundaries of the Humboldt constituency are the battlegrounds of Batoche, the Red River Trail, and the home of the Benedictine monks, St. Peter's Colony.

Well the people of my constituency, in their great wisdom, have elected a woman to get the job done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — And I fully expect that the trend to elect more women to govern will continue. There is a clear indication by the public of its need for a more balanced approach in decision making. The citizens of Saskatchewan require justice, they require respect, they require common sense and compassion. These are values that are for the most part lacking in government today.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province want their elected officials to embody those principles. If one looks around our world today, it is obvious that there is a power shift taking place. People want a government that will assist them in directing their energies towards making a vital contribution to society. Governments who insist upon clinging to the politics of power and control are destroying the very basis of our communities. This kind of government is no longer trusted. And, Mr. Speaker, if people no longer trust their government, they will soon refuse to be governed by them. Elected officials will be elected in the future by their ability to understand that the mandate given them by the people is one of service and not control.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Mr. Speaker, the people of the Humboldt constituency are an extraordinary people. They are enthusiastic and they have a strong work ethic. They believe in family and community. These are qualities that our parents and grandparents based their lives on. From their predecessors, they have inherited a vision of community centred around their spiritual beliefs. They have a respect for individual initiative and still they have a clear understanding of their need for each other.

This attitude has supported and strengthened them in their communities in the past and it continues to do so now. And I thank God for that, as it bolsters their resolve to stand firm, defending the lifeblood of rural Saskatchewan. Through this reliance on one another, they have weathered many storms by using positive energies to protect their valued heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to share with this Assembly and with the people of Saskatchewan the names of just a few individuals, organizations, and businesses involved in the ongoing creative work of the Humboldt constituency. We have Bourgeois

Industries, and Freeform Plastic Products of St. Brieux; PAMI (Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute), CanAmera Foods, Del-Air Systems. We have shared hog operations in Cudworth, Humboldt, and throughout the constituency. We have Hillcrest Farms, Leon's Welding & Repair in Bruno, Redi-mix, and Buckle Transport in Bruno. We have Belle Pulses, and Mic-Ren Seeds in Bellevue; Horizon Seeds, and Hold-on Industries in Aberdeen. Kirsch Construction in Middle Lake. Foresters Seed Farm, Russell Hanson's lynx farm near Domremy. We have Ferme Champentre vacation farm of St. Denis. Blazing Wildflower Seed company in St. Benedict. Wolverine Resources of Humboldt, Wakaw Marine & Outfitting, and Helga's Herbs in Aberdeen.

I must also commend the Ursulines, the Elizabethans, and the Daughters of Providence for their contributions to health, education, and family life over the years.

I am pleased to recognize the following people for their great achievements. High-Line Manufacturing of Vonda, and Mumby Manufacturing of St. Brieux, for reaching the finals in the 1995 ABEX (Awards for Business Excellence) awards. And Precision Profiles Plus of St. Brieux for winning the ABEX award for the best new venture in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Saide Urban, who won the Saskatchewan Career Work Education Association Award of Excellence, and Jason Leuschen for the E.F. Ambassador Scholarship and for participating in the 1995 Youth Parliament, and to Sasha White and Trent Washkowsky for winning the Governor General's Medal.

The surrounding communities also enjoy a wide range of activities and entertainment provided by a score of sports and cultural organizations, including the Humboldt Broncos.

Mr. Speaker, the people of my constituency have tenacity and determination. For example, plans for the REACT waste management operation are under way in the Humboldt district. Although the Minister of Environment was reluctant to help, local supporters were adamant that this value added project continue. Through a massive lobbying campaign, they eventually convinced the government to honour its commitment.

I am equally as proud of the grade 12 students of Humboldt Collegiate who have become involved in the political process by meeting with the Minister of Highways, explaining their views on the need for a new highway, No. 368.

And, Mr. Speaker, I applaud the farmers of my constituency. How very courageous they have chosen to be over the past four years through difficult times and blatant disregard by this government. They have been betrayed, cheated, and ignored. These are people who feed the world, and they deserve the utmost of respect.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Thanks to their tenacious and adaptable spirits, they have persevered. And although many of them are down,

they refuse to be beaten. Many are risk-takers who are growing new crops and adding value to their primary commodities.

I can only hope that the government will begin to value farmers and truly support their efforts to expand business opportunities and create jobs as promised in the Speech from the Throne. I worry though because of the present government's refusal to create an environment supportive of new growth. I am concerned for all the people of this province.

Our sons and daughters are looking for jobs. Five hundred Saskatchewan residents have lost their jobs within the last two weeks. Unemployment rates are high. Welfare rolls are high, and the number of people on social assistance is growing. More people are forced to rely on food banks for sustenance. There is growing violence, spousal and child abuse, drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions. Child poverty, child prostitution, and increasing numbers of teen pregnancies are symptoms of a social time bomb waiting to explode. Our children are being hit especially hard, Mr. Speaker, and nothing in the government's throne speech was able to reassure me that changes will be carefully structured to address these problems, now or in the long term.

Mr. Speaker, daily I receive calls from desperate people telling me of children falling between the cracks — children traumatized and in situations that place their lives at great risk. Grandmothers speak of efforts to offer solutions. They have sought support and help from the Minister of Social Services, only to be referred to the rule book which spells out inadequate policies that do not address the root of their problems. The system is failing our children, Mr. Speaker. What does their future hold if this government continues with their distorted sense of values?

We, as members of this Assembly, must remember that the business we do here each and every day should be based on what is best for the people who elected us. We must respect their intelligence and their ability to deal with issues facing their communities. We must support their ability to identify problems, to pool resources, to develop strategies, and then to implement solutions of their own. Mr. Speaker, I will work to ensure that the government acknowledges its most important obligation: to truly listen to the people of this province.

As Social Service critic for the official opposition, I am taking note of how the government is treating the disadvantaged people of Saskatchewan. The policies of this government and of the previous government have served to create dependencies. We all pay a high price for that, not only in actual dollars, but in the quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that government chooses which social forces to liberate and which to suppress. Because of this, governments are ultimately responsible for what we become. Therefore government members bear a heightened responsibility for the moral state of society. And it is their responsibility to seek out the best in that society and to develop and strengthen it. And I, Mr. Speaker, along with the people of this province, truly hope that this government will begin to develop policies and programs that will improve the quality of

life for those in need. We need policies that serve to restore people's dignity, their faith, and their sense of personal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, this government's discussion paper on Redesigning Social Assistance does not live up to this moral obligation. For example, had this government placed some value on true consultation with people instead of assuming it knows best, it may have instituted proposals to address the real problems, and not merely those that would manipulate numbers for political gain.

I see nothing in this document that will create sustainable employment. Rather, this government is suggesting a reform package that will move a number of dependent people from one program budget to another. Regrettably, this smacks of the politics of the 1980s. Mr. Speaker, the government has placed a burden on the people of Saskatchewan, both financially and spiritually. The majority of people are dissatisfied with the government's handling of social services, education, health care, and with the high level of taxation, and lack of jobs.

(1515)

Low voter turn-out during the last election is indicative of the growing cynicism evident in this province. Each of us, as elected representatives of the people, must realize that every decision that we make has long-reaching implications. We must restore people's faith in government and eliminate their feelings of powerlessness.

And, Mr. Speaker, I am anxiously awaiting the day when the NDP government will stop blaming every difficulty on previous administrations and the federal government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Julé: — Blaming others is a sign of weakness and demonstrates a refusal to accept responsibility. People expect more than finger pointing. They look forward to the day when collaborative efforts bring about constructive solutions to our problems.

Time and again, Mr. Speaker, I have been persuaded that goodwill is slumbering in our society. It's just that many people are confused. They don't know what to rely on, where to begin, or how to find meaningful outlets.

Politicians can awaken this potential, they can offer it direction, and they can ease its passage. There are many challenges to be met in the days and the years ahead and many opportunities worthy of pursuit. It is my hope, Mr. Speaker, that this government will use the power the citizens of this good province have assigned to its members to serve the people well.

The best way to improve the lives of people is to encourage them to help themselves, to help them see their potential. We can help by creating policies and legislation that provides sustainable benefits to all of us.

May I conclude, Mr. Speaker, by counselling all members of

this legislature to respect the wisdom, values, and aspirations of our Saskatchewan seniors and to heed their directions when facing these challenges. May we conduct ourselves with integrity, prudence, and competence that is expected of us as members of this Assembly. And may we look to you, Mr. Speaker, for guidance and direction in our conduct.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude by expressing my confidence in the philosophy of liberalism: free enterprise with a social conscience. Therefore I cannot support the motion to approve the Speech from the Throne as it makes mockery of the principles my constituents and I believe in. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well let me begin by congratulating you, sir, Mr. Speaker. Your new role is a vitally important one requiring wisdom, fairness, and — yes — determination. And although the members of this Assembly will miss your entertaining oratory in debate, we are fortunate indeed to be the beneficiaries of many of the attributes that you bring to your position as Speaker. And I look forward as well to the guidance of the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood as he assumes duties as Deputy Speaker.

I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome new members to this Assembly and especially the mover from Battleford-Cut Knife and the seconder from Regina South who did admirably well in their first speeches to us yesterday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Haverstock: — One of the most enjoyable experiences of speaking once again in this forum is to acknowledge the new staff and the experienced staff. To the new Sergeant-at-Arms and the pages, I do say welcome. And to the Clerk, Clerks, and Deputy Clerks and their staff, to those at *Hansard*, the staff at the Legislative Library, to the security who greet us and care for us in our absence, to the Office of the Law Clerk, audio-visual services who, many people in the province don't realize, stay here as long as we do into the night on occasion, and — yes — the cleaning staff. I say thanks in advance for facilitating our work on the behalf of the public.

It has been one very long year, Mr. Speaker, since I had the privilege of replying to the Speech from the Throne in the last session. And much has happened since; many, many things have changed. The opportunities I have to participate in this House may be more limited, but that only makes them much more precious. Therefore it is an honour for me to rise today in my place as the elected member for Saskatoon Greystone and speak these words.

Fellow members of the Assembly, I am the public servant of the people of Saskatoon Greystone. The families who live in my constituency — parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren — are like the families who live in your constituencies. Saskatoon Greystone was the largest urban constituency before the redrawing of the electoral boundaries. And yes indeed, my constituency changed substantially right prior to the last election. Greystone has 11,649 voters today. Of

all the identified occupations in my constituency, retirees, homemakers, and students constitute over 51 per cent of the demographic make-up. And 53 per cent of the voters in my constituency are women.

Each of the individuals in these 7,300 households in Saskatoon Greystone has their own set of personal goals and each its own set of obstacles. But all of them have basic needs, and all of them want and deserve to provide for their needs or to be looked upon with compassion if they are unable to do so.

Too often in the heat of debate and under the pressures of partisan politics, we forget that we are here because we asked for and received the support of people, the people who vote for us in our constituencies. They did not support us because they knew how much we enjoyed the happenings of this Assembly. They did not support us to further our political careers. They supported us because they have expectations — expectations of their political system, of their government, of the ever-increasing taxation dollars that are demanded from them by civic, provincial, and federal governments. They elected us to represent them.

When times are good, people do not think much about their government. They assume that government is there to regulate and supervise the operation of agencies and departments necessary to keep law and order, to maintain infrastructure, and to deliver essential services. When times are good, politicians cut ribbons, and sometimes they cut cakes. When times are bad, politicians cut programs, and they cut jobs.

Government policies are more than just rhetoric that becomes legislation. Government policies have a direct impact on the lives of real people. And in the Speech from the Throne, there's a reference to sweeping changes to social assistance. I'm optimistic about this commitment and I hope that the government will be very thoughtful and very thorough in its approach because there are such serious, serious problems in this area, many of which were eloquently, I think, described by the hon. member from Humboldt.

The legislation that was introduced in Bill 58, for instance, was directed in part at eliminating prejudice against social assistance recipients. But this government's failure to take action on the issue of damage deposits is now causing a backlash in the market-place, a backlash which is directed at this very administration. Unfortunately the very people that the government was trying to protect by Bill 58 are being caught in the crossfire, and they really are hurting.

Whatever the proposed changes, one hopes that they will hopefully reward those people who are trying to get ahead, trying to become independent of the system, and by the same token discourage, in fact deter and, if necessary, even punish those who abuse our very precious safety nets.

It is no secret that the social welfare system is not a friend to those who are trying to escape its grasp. And a poignant example came to me in a telephone call just within this past week, and I'd like to share it with you and the members of this Assembly.

A woman called looking for information about how much one can earn while collecting social assistance before their benefits are reduced. And she was advocating for a young, single mother who had reached a hopeless impasse.

In trying to call Social Services, this is what I specifically experienced. We experienced the frustration of reaching voice mail after voice mail, sometimes being told that the mailbox was full. And for people in desperate circumstances to be thwarted in their attempts to even talk to a real person at the other end of the line is a very, very difficult thing to accept.

Now we did manage to find out that the limit on what this young mother can earn before having her benefits reduced is \$50 plus 20 per cent of her net income, not to exceed \$150 a month. That, Mr. Speaker, is government policy.

And here is her reality. The young woman gets a total of \$533.68 every month. In addition, she can earn \$150 before her benefits are reduced. Every extra dollar she earns comes off her welfare cheque, dollar for dollar.

She found a job and she found it through New Careers, a government program. She leaves her baby with a sitter and works about 25 hours a week at a bar, but it costs almost \$20 per night for a sitter. And at the end of the week she earns \$150 and pays out a hundred dollars for a sitter. At the end of the month, she should be ahead by \$200.

Now if the system worked, she would be able to have a little extra money for the basic needs for herself and for her daughter. But the system doesn't work. It most certainly doesn't work as well as we would like it to and that's why I assume that this is being addressed by the government.

The fact is that of the \$600 she earned, \$450 is deducted from her already meagre allowance of \$533.68. And in the end she has only \$75 more to show for working for a whole month. This is her reality, Mr. Speaker. It may not be the case for the member from Saskatoon who is shaking his head, but this is in fact what she is living.

So why bother working, she asks. Not only does she only come out \$75 ahead, she now has an extra \$400 expense for a sitter. This young woman has concluded that her life and circumstances are hopeless, a tragedy in any case if people believe their circumstance is hopeless. She feels that the system is actually punishing her for wanting to work. A young woman who is excited just months ago about the possibility of having a job and improving her life and earning her own way is now bitter, discouraged, and resigned to the living on welfare.

Now we do all hope, and I believe that everyone of us hopes, that the government's commitment to changing social assistance in Saskatchewan is very real, and the government has my commitment to assist with accomplishing that.

These are not the best of times, Mr. Speaker. They are not the best of times for the people of Saskatoon Greystone. They most certainly are not the best of times for people who typically struggle even when times are good — the poor, the

unemployed, the aged, the infirm. These are tough times indeed for many, many people, and we must not lose sight that the priorities of every member in this Assembly should remain fixed on that particular fact.

I know that the opening of the legislature is a time when rhetoric is served up like hors d'oeuvres in a holiday season, and the Speech from the Throne tells us things like, and I'm going to give a direct quote: "Our province has restored its financial health."

But it's hard for people, when they're sitting at home listening to this, to that very statement, to find the tangible evidence in their own reality because they see through the rhetoric pretty quickly, Mr. Speaker, and they ask very tough questions, tough questions of people like me. They say if our province has restored its financial health why are my taxes so high? And they say things like this to me: when am I going to get a chance to restore the financial health of my family now that the government has forced me to exhaust my savings just to pay my bills? Those are the questions that I'm being asked.

And when they are told, as in the Speech from the Throne, that our economy is growing and strong, they pick up the paper and they see that 128 people were laid off at Saskatchewan newspapers; and then they look at their phone bill and they see long-distance charges to their own children, who now live in British Columbia and Alberta because this government failed to deliver on its promise in the past of jobs, and they say yes, right, the economy is strong and growing but not in this province of Saskatchewan or my children wouldn't have to leave.

(1530)

It is important, it is important to be optimistic. It's important for us to be enthusiastic, but it is even more important to be responsible and to be very, very realistic, to point to the realism and not to try to distort people's expectations so that we can do true problem solving as legislators in this Assembly.

Everyone in government, and indeed in the media, are talking about the 21st century, and how exciting it is to prepare for the new millennium. But at the kitchen tables in my constituency, and I'm sure in other people's constituencies as well, people are talking about the end of the month. They're talking about the new crop year. They're wondering if they can make it to pay day. They're wondering what will happen to them if they lose their job. What will happen if they don't find a job soon.

In some parts of the province where 1995 was not a good year, they're wondering how they can plant this year's crop and pay last year's bills. Regular folks are not thinking about preparing for the next century, Mr. Speaker, and they're hoping that this administration has not forgotten about today in its enthusiasm to get ready for the next millennium.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan and those in Saskatoon Greystone can look forward to seeing a focus on their own priorities, the people's priorities, in this, our session.

Now speaking of priorities, the government indicates that yet again it's first priority is jobs and growth. It seems to me that the whole *Partnership for Renewal* was predicated upon the notion that jobs and growth were the priority last time. Now, the word priority means preceding in order of importance. There are very few people in the world who have the luxury of having just one priority in their lives, and nobody gets to spend all their time on just one priority.

Finance is a priority for everyone. From government to grade school allowance earners — everyone has to deal with finances and debt and money obligations. But there is also family and friends and work and health and community. Just as the citizens of Saskatchewan have to divide their time and resources between their most pressing priorities, they expect their government, this government, to deploy some of the resources that they as taxpayers provide to addressing the financial management of government. And they fully expect that the rest of their resources will be directed to their priorities of job creation and health care and education.

To imply, Mr. Speaker, that all the Crown's horses and all the Crown's men have been so preoccupied with the Department of Finance that nothing else could be a priority is truly unfortunate. To imply that the Minister of Finance was preventing the Minister of Economic Development from doing his job is almost absurd. Would the government have us believe that job creation will now take off because the Minister of Finance and all of the number crunchers who were dealing with the management of the deficit and the Treasury Board issues are now free to lend a hand or to lend their expertise to getting the economy on track?

I think we sell the people of this province short if we think the public believes that the *Partnership for Growth* is any different from the *Partnership for Renewal*. After all, Mr. Speaker, does anyone really believe that this government has had job creation solutions all along but was withholding it from the people until it could become, in quotes, the first priority? Of course not. No one believes that.

The facts are that the NDP has failed to stimulate the economy. They have failed to create the climate necessary for business to go about the business of creating jobs. The fact is that we have had a net loss of employers in Saskatchewan under this administration. The fact is that there are fewer people working today than there were a year ago. This is not rhetoric. It is not misplaced prioritizing. It is fact.

And while everyone in Saskatchewan agrees without question that it is incumbent upon any government to manage with fiscal prudence, while everyone agrees that jobs are a priority, while everyone agrees that the NDP have been talking about jobs being a priority since 1991, nobody can measure the evidence that the NDP has successfully addressed this priority. Whether it was the NDP's first or second priority is irrelevant. What is relevant to people looking for work is that this government talked the talk, but not walked the walk. It has promised jobs but not delivered jobs.

And so we say beware, because the people are watching us.

They're watching all of us, and they're wanting so much for this administration to succeed in this very, very crucial area. They're wanting all of us to work on their behalf to do the best job possible. But they're not willing to accept from any of us empty promises or excuses or simple finger pointing any longer. They want action; they want it swift and they want it decisive. And they want results — not manipulated statistics, not bizarre interpretations of isolated blips on the seasonally adjusted employment figures.

They want to go out and apply for a real job and they want to get a real pay cheque. That's what they want. That is what they are being promised and that is what they deserve to expect.

Now how it is achieved isn't important to any one of them. When it is achieved is very important because they want jobs now. And they want the 10,000 jobs promised in the last term but were not delivered. And they want the other 30,000 jobs that the government promised by the end of 1999, and they want them in a timely fashion. And they are waiting and I'm waiting too.

The throne speech talked about reducing regulatory burden, about trade and export, about regional economic development. These are very, very good things to talk about. They're even more important things and better things to do. Saskatchewan can do much better. On that we all concur. And it will do better when the focus is on the right things.

But the disconcerting thing is that this government continues to believe that it has been doing the right things in the economy when it really has been doing the left things, or what I term the wrong things — high taxation levels, the decision in workers' compensation, union-only tendering policies. These are disincentives. And the government knows this because the job creators come to them and tell them this.

As many of us agree and have agreed and I think many people, perhaps even on the government side, would concur, Mr. Howe's statement in the *Star-Phoenix* of March 4 really does state something with which we have to be able to concur with an open mind. Now this was right under where it stated, 128 jobs lost, and it's from the March 14 *Star-Phoenix*, and I quote:

The economy should be roaring down the blacktop judging by the strong signals coming from the retail, resource, and agriculture sectors. Export sales are also up dramatically. Despite all the good news, the economy is sputtering because of government policies that choke business and job creation.

Now Howe says the economy grew by about 2 per cent in 1994 and that it will likely do the same thing in 1995. This is less than Saskatchewan's historical average of over 3 per cent.

Now how do we figure this, Mr. Speaker? Just think on this. How do we expect to even maintain our historical average if we can't even have average growth when we have optimal economic conditions? How could we have had actual growth of more than 3 per cent despite years of 21 per cent interest rates, drought, grasshoppers, low resource prices, and yet today with

low interest rates, higher than average agricultural prices, zooming resource prices, we can't even maintain the average, never mind exceed the projections.

Now there are plenty of ideas about how to get government out of the economy. One can decide on which to pick. But at least pick one, is what I say, Mr. Speaker. Choose a plan which will stop the meddling and the market-place manipulation, and then let our economy grow for people.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this government wants to do right by the people of Saskatchewan. I believe they want to succeed where they, perhaps, and others have failed in the past. But in order to do that, there has to be change. The election is over. No one is going to change the government. But perhaps we can help to change the way that all members of government think.

Perhaps through debate we can modify the approach on some issues. And if we can do that, as members of the opposition and as members of the Assembly as a whole, then we are going to most certainly earn our pay cheques and deserve the respect of the electors that they showed us at the polls in June.

There will be almost 100 pieces of legislation brought forward this session. That's a gargantuan load of distractions for a government that claims to have only one priority. There are more than 500 statutes on the books in Saskatchewan. This means that by what will come forward in this session, that will be changed by some 20 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

It would be easy to conclude that this government intends to tinker with perhaps all of them before its time in power ends. The trouble is, Mr. Speaker, that there has been too much tinkering and not enough strategically planned reform to our system. And I truly hope that there is a strategy at work by which these 100 pieces of legislation and amendments will play some role in creating a much more viable free enterprise economy in our province of Saskatchewan.

I hope that the government will replace the ready, fire, aim approach it employed in health care reform with a more careful plan when it comes to the proposed reforms in education and municipal government. And it is simply not good enough to have the attitude that something is wrong with Saskatchewan so government will arbitrarily fiddle with everything, hoping that it might accidentally push the right button, or pull the right lever, as the Minister of Economic Development is so fond of saying.

By tinkering with everything, as this government seems to love to do, Mr. Speaker, the situation could go from malfunctioning to irreparable. And because everything has been fiddled with, from health care to education to the economy to municipal government, we may indeed arrive at a point where nothing is working and nobody can fix anything.

So I urge the government to continue to seek advice, and most certainly to heed that advice from people who are out there and live day-to-day lives, both in the business world and municipal government and so forth. By all means, the government should fix crop insurance, but one hopes that while doing so, it will

indeed keep in mind what crop insurance is for and who it is for. It is not about politics. It's not about patronage. It's not even about getting even with previous administrations for what they did to our people. It is so important to obtain knowledgeable input about building the kind of efficient, reliable system that can operate with low overhead and set a zero tolerance policy for political interference.

It's good that this will be addressed, but the process is what we want to hear about. And it's important to note what producers want, and that it is what the people who understand their roles as employees at Crop Insurance really want too.

I want to mention briefly the aspect of intergovernmental cooperation, Mr. Speaker. This is a tough world. It's tough for all governments. And when we have common goals, we have to stick together. We have to support one another along the way despite our partisan differences. People will tolerate partisanship on the campaign trail; in fact they come to expect it. And they expect it at political gatherings as well. But they don't want to see it or hear it when the best interests of their families and their communities are at stake.

(1545)

And I understand the federal and provincial governments across the nation are in a very difficult era of devolution and evolution. There will be changes to the status quo similar to those which the provincial government has initiated with municipal governments. It is so critical for our provincial government to acknowledge the contributions that have been made by the federal government to programs in our province that benefit the people of Saskatchewan.

If this Assembly continues to be a platform for the provincial New Democrats to denigrate the federal Liberals, instead of a vehicle through which federal-provincial cooperation can be fostered and acknowledged, then we can't pretend to be acting in the best interests of the people who elected both governments, Mr. Speaker, because it was the people's choice. It was their choice to put a majority of Liberal MPs (Members of Parliament) in Ottawa and a majority of New Democrats in this Assembly.

So it is incumbent upon us to be gracious about the resources that flow to us from the taxpayers through the federal government from Ottawa. It is incumbent upon us to present a fair and accurate picture of how those resources are being allocated. And everyone is aware that there will be changes to transfer payments in health care and education and social services. But not everyone wants to play the game of good cop, bad cop that this government seems determined to force into the agenda of every speech and every question period.

Mr. Speaker, it concerns me a great deal because I truly believe that the people of this province will not be served well if in fact Reform members are sent to Ottawa the next go-around. And if we think we will be better off sending Members of Parliament to Ottawa who carry the Reform flag, we will not. Our government relations will not be as good. We most certainly would not have the same kind of cooperation. And with this

incessant, persistent denigration, this is precisely the message that the people of this province will receive. And I don't think that is going to serve us well in terms of serving the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it is the people of our province and of our nation from which governments receive their mandate. The throne speech indicates that the government, and I quote: "accepts a renewed mandate from the people of Saskatchewan with enthusiasm." Once again I say, caution. And I caution the government not to get caught up in rhetoric and forget our collective reality. Yes they won the election. But the reality is only 68 per cent of eligible electors voted. That's a tragedy, and it's a travesty, and it is an embarrassment. And less than half of those people, Mr. Speaker, voted to endorse this government. That's correct. Of 636,000 eligible voters only 408,000 people voted, and 193,000 of them gave this government its mandate. As a percentage, that is support from just one in three people eligible to vote.

It is important not to confuse being elected with having the unequivocal support of the majority. Ultimately we have to remember that people deserve to know what the plan is for the province because this is where they want to spend their futures. And regardless of the enthusiasm for its mandate, this government has an obligation. It has an obligation to the people to let them know its plans, specific plans, openly and in detail from the outset if it intends to make any more sweeping changes that will affect the fabric of people's communities.

Now I was hopeful of course that I could play a greater role in this session, in which we could set aside the rhetoric and focus on the real, day-to-day problems of people and find ways in which we could all create the solutions. My role in this session will now be far, far different from what most of us, I think, anticipated that it would be. However, Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain; I am here to serve. I am here to serve the constituents of Greystone, and I intend to use every opportunity to convey their concerns, their criticisms, and indeed their compliments on the performance of this government throughout the session.

And before my summation, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my family, who have given me unconditional love and support in my seven years in political life. And too often they've really sacrificed their time and their needs for me for what they saw as the longer-term, greater good. To them and to my true friends, I say my life would be meaningless without them.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech as always is laden with good intentions. And as always, the proof will be in the pudding. There are many things missing from the speech such as a commitment to lower taxes and increase our competitive position. The intention to tinker with dozens of statutes is also a concern for me, and I made it a comment last week about the fact that there is a government much larger than our own serving people many, many greater in populace that are putting forward 30 pieces of legislation in their province.

I also want to point out, interestingly enough, that a year ago they put forward 53 pieces of legislation in Alberta. And collectively the private members' public Bills and the private

members' Bills put forward in Alberta exceeded the number of government Bills. And as a result of that kind of participation from their official opposition and the encouragement of the public to get involved with private members' Bills, they were able to have hearings ignited throughout the province that did a great deal to influence public policy. And I think that that's great. I think it's great because what it does is to renew a sense of democracy and involvement in government practice.

Having said all that, Mr. Speaker, for the record let me say that while I support much of the intent of the Speech from the Throne, I shall, out of respect for the electors of Saskatoon Greystone and the many Saskatchewan citizens with whom I continue to consult, I will withhold my support from the motion until such time as I see evidence that the good intentions are resulting in tangible, positive actions by this government. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I never thought I would have one up on you, but here we are — me in my second term as MLA, you in your first term as Speaker. If you need any help from an old-timer like me, just ask.

Mr. Speaker, I do congratulate you. Like other members, I feel good that you are in charge of the House. With you in charge, dignity, order will be kept. I congratulate you, as I thank the voters of Saskatchewan Rivers constituency for re-electing me. Some of my voters know me from last time. Some I inherited with the changes of the new boundaries. But I am proud to say that the voters in both the old and new parts of my constituency support me and reject opposition parties.

Like the member from Battleford-Cut Knife said, my re-election was because of the record and the leadership of the New Democratic Party. I am proud to be part of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Langford: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Rivers extends from MacDowall to the west, to Birch Hills on the south, White Fox on the east, Waskesiu on the north. It swallows the town of Prince Albert and spits out two constituencies — Prince Albert Carlton and Prince Albert Northcote. There are five first nation reserves in my constituency.

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

Mr. Flavel: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Flavel: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly today, 10 students and a teacher from the Earl Grey School, grade 11 and 12 law class.

I would ask all members to please show their respect and make

them welcome. And I want to welcome them here this afternoon and hope you enjoy the proceedings that are going on. So I'd ask all members to please welcome them.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY (continued)

Mr. Langford: — As I said, Mr. Speaker, there are five first nation reserves in my constituency — Sturgeon Lake, Little Red, Muskoday, James Smith, and Wahpeton. We have forestry, farming, diamond explorations, fishing and farming activities, and small-business classes. We have pulp and paper and several small lumber mills and post-treating plants.

There are traditional crops, but some very exciting new developments in farming are also taking place. The town of Choiceland, on the top of the farming area of Saskatchewan, has a potato-processing plant that provides jobs for Choiceland so they don't have to go to our large cities. And we have farmers in the Birch Hills area that are planting garlic. Garlic, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is the wonder drug of today. Few people who chew several cloves of garlic a day suffer from being . . . (inaudible) . . . I think that's a proven fact.

Saskatchewan Rivers is the entrance to most of Saskatchewan's best tourist attraction. Part of the *Partnership for Growth* is built on tourism, and people come here because of the fishing, the hunting, and the scenery. Every year people in the Candle Lake area host Sask 100, Mr. Speaker, a rally that attracts competition and spectators and fans from all over Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan is a good place to live, work, and visit, Mr. Speaker. I have the same pride in my constituency that all members have because there are things happening. The people are hard-working and they are optimistic. Unlike the member of the two and a half opposition parties, they are optimistic. They are positive about the future, not because of the government is doing . . . what it's doing, but what the people are doing with the government, Mr. Speaker.

All over the province, Mr. Speaker, businesses, workers, industry, cooperatives, communities, and individuals are getting together to take our society into the next century. We see the cooperation in the foundation of REDAs across the province. We see it in the building of exciting new industries in agriculture and telecommunications. We see it in the way people are working together to modernize our health, social assistance, and education and training programs.

We are not staying put; we are moving ahead. At least some of us are. All we hear from across the floor is fear and whining. Don't change this, don't do that, don't take us ahead; we want to go back.

I look across the floor, Mr. Speaker, and I see well-dressed, well-fed, well-groomed people. People who are working, who were working before they came here. I don't think any of them have missed a meal in a while, any more than I have, and all I hear from this well-fed bunch is complaining.

Nothing is good enough for them. They either want Saskatchewan to be like Alberta, Alabama, or any place else. They do not want Saskatchewan to be like Saskatchewan. The only way they will be happy is when Saskatchewan people betray their roots.

I don't think this is going to happen, Mr. Speaker. And to the members of the Liberal Party, I can say this. There might be a few things wrong with Saskatchewan, but 90 per cent of the trouble we have now are caused by your brothers and sisters in Ottawa, the federal Liberals.

(1600)

The member from Thunder Creek and Ottawa spends all their time defending poor Paul Martin and says Ottawa . . . they say nothing, not a word for Saskatchewan. And the same goes for rest of them.

What did they say when the Crow rate was finished by the Liberals after the Mulroney Tories crippled it? They said nothing. What did they say when freight rates were increased by Ottawa? They said nothing. What did they say when Ottawa dumped hundreds of off-reserve welfare recipients onto the province, betraying its responsibilities? They said nothing.

What did they say when Paul Martin cut \$100 million from the transfer payments? What did they say when Martin said he would take another \$100 million out next year?

An Hon. Member: — Nothing.

Mr. Langford: — Right. When Saskatchewan acts, they complain. When Ottawa retreats, they say nothing. What a great bunch of representatives of the people of Saskatchewan. The Tories want Saskatchewan to be some place else. The Liberals want to pay for someone else. New Democrats are perfectly happy with where we are, and we're excited about what is happening in Saskatchewan.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, because I believe the future is positive for Saskatchewan and because I believe this throne speech sets us on the right path for the future, I will support the motion and reject the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I stand here before the Assembly today as the member for the Athabasca constituency and as a proud member of the official opposition.

Before I begin, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on being elected Speaker of the Assembly, as I am very confident that you will treat the position with dignity and all fairness. I would also like to congratulate the Deputy Speaker

and all members upon their election to the Legislative Assembly and for their commitment to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, my favourite number in anything is 99, not for Wayne Gretzky but for the year 1999. But, Mr. Speaker, for a long, long time I have wished that these words be spoken in this hall of this Legislative Assembly. These words are from the people of the Athabasca constituency and they are calling for economic and social justice for the people of the North.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, there comes a time for every politician of every stripe and every colour to take a stand and to draw a line in which they fundamentally believe in, Mr. Speaker. And today I wish to announce to my own party, and especially to the Government of Saskatchewan, that I'll protect with all my energy, commitment and ability, the rights of the people of the Athabasca constituency. As well I'll be continually bringing forward their issues and concerns that have for many years not been heard in this Assembly.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — I will not get into detail, Mr. Speaker, as to the background of the Athabasca constituency because my friends opposite of me have had a member in here for 20 years. And if they don't know about the Athabasca constituency, then I'm afraid they'll never find out. So, Mr. Speaker, I will not get into detail as to the background of my constituency.

As elected members of the Legislative Assembly we must stop turning our backs on the northern Saskatchewan people and especially the native people. Over the next year and the year after and the year after, I will continue to hammer home that message and work to establish a cooperative relationship between this government and all governments with the northern and native people. A message that I hope, Mr. Speaker, will stay and will echo throughout these halls for many, many years.

It is time that we take a fresh innovative approach to the plight of northern Saskatchewan's people. An approach that respects northern residents. An approach that respects and builds on the dreams and aspirations of the people. An approach that respects the unique qualities of the entire northern part of this province.

I have no profound message to make, Mr. Speaker, nor do I have a dazzling sideshow to highlight the issues of the North. What I do have is a message of common concerns and a common sense northern approach.

Over time governments have been told time and again what needs to be done; and governments, time after time, have not listened to northern people. This is not right, Mr. Speaker. Politics above all else should be about humanity and should be about respect. Mr. Speaker, the people of the North know without a doubt that they have been taken for granted for many, many years. The northern people have propped up industries, huge bureaucratic systems, and generated wealth beyond anyone's wildest dreams, and they have received little respect in return. They have received little respect from government and in some cases little respect from corporations. This lack of

respect has been continued by this government.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government has addressed the northern people in three paragraphs — three paragraphs, Mr. Speaker. Two deal with mining and the other is an empty statement that I assume is supposed to make northern people feel better. What a message. And I quote:

My government will also work with First Nations and Metis to continue to promote and foster greater self-sufficiency, and new economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, these are empty words from a government that has continued to ignore the people of the North. The one ray of hope I have for the people of the Athabasca constituency, although I admit I am sceptical, is that this government will include the North if they do double the number of regional economic development authorities. I will work with anyone to help make this come to pass.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — My message to the government is clear. Stop taking advantage of the North. Stop ignoring the North, and help the North. And we will work together because, Mr. Speaker, the people of my constituency have much to offer — more than just mining and more than just forestry. They need to be encouraged and deserve encouragement to bolster the economy from the ground up and to make sure the economy is community based and community controlled. They need a government that will help them establish a sustainable economy based on viable business opportunities and a hope for the future. It is time for a new approach for northern Saskatchewan.

I am also concerned about other promises as well, in the government's throne speech. For example, they promised to alleviate child poverty. But, Mr. Speaker, this is a promise that was made in 1991, and still many of my people in my constituency are still living below the poverty line. A promise is a promise. How can they be expected to have faith in this government's words when they say one thing and do another? All the suffering, in spite of all the wealth of the resources that northern Saskatchewan has to offer, and they continue to ignore that.

When it comes to health, Mr. Speaker, the North is ahead of everyone else. No they're not ahead in services. No they're not ahead in facilities. The North is ahead in per capita cases of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and the list goes on. I fear the government may have forgotten northern people in their so-called health reforms.

I'd also like to point out that the grave problems with our provincial highways were not addressed in the government's throne speech message. People in my constituency have to deal with horrendous road conditions, Mr. Speaker. Road conditions that could affect the safety and yes, even the lives of these people. There are major problems when communities like Garson Lake cannot be connected to the rest of the province. When large communities like Turnor Lake, Patuanak, Dillon, and Pinehouse cannot be accessed in the spring and in the fall

because of washouts and unacceptable road conditions.

And I guess to summarize the road situation and the many frustrations that the people of the North have, one elder from my constituency was told over a period of years that the road to his community of Turnor Lake was on the list to be fixed up and repaired. After a few years, Mr. Speaker, he has found out that you can't travel on a list.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, apparently the government doesn't care. We talk about northern housing, but many disabled people live in substandard housing; when people who feel the blast of the icy cold of winter have to put insulation in their windows to keep their houses warm.

Mr. Speaker, I am not lying to the Assembly here, I'm telling the truth. You talk about health services. When one community has trailers lumped together to form their hospitals, that's health service, Mr. Speaker.

Education, the last stop effort of trying to solve the northern problems, is being ignored. Recreation, problems galore. Seniors, they're struggling. And many times seniors have to help raise families because of the lack of income.

Mr. Speaker, it seems the government does not care about the people in the North, especially the far North, who are also burdened with extremely high food prices and isolation.

Today is 1996. Way up in the far northern part of my constituency is a community called Stony Rapids. Stony Rapids hasn't got water and sewer, Mr. Speaker. How many years and how many millions of dollars have been poured out of the North? Why hasn't, in this day and age, 1996, Stony Rapids has not got no water and sewer? Black Lake, asking for a road, Mr. Speaker — one and a half million dollars this province contributed to a road. What kind of a road will one and a half dollars build — 120 kilometres of road. I don't think it's going to happen.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about government, talking to northern people, I ask them to include them in any plans they have; to consult with them and get their permission. Mr. Speaker, you have to include people in any aspect of community development because people in the North do have good ideas. It is an insult to their intelligence when you refuse to help them make decisions about their own lives.

I ask the Assembly today, Mr. Speaker, what the people of the North can pass on to their children. They don't own land, they don't own the houses that they live in, they can't control the system that operates in their communities, and they're largely ignored and not allowed to become involved in the northern economy. It is the provincial government that can establish the channels that will take and promote independence and growth through business and economic development.

This is what this is all about, Mr. Speaker. It is about the children and the future. All the people of my constituency long

for is a fair chance to participate in the development and in the prosperity of the North. Through you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, I ask that you not judge northern people harshly on the actions of a few, but rather on the dreams of the many. Perhaps all of us have not been strong enough nor supportive enough to really build an understanding amongst the people of the North and the people of the South.

However, it is not too late. We can still build respect and understanding. We must remember as government that we will reap what we sow, and we cannot continue sowing the seeds of discontent with any group or any region of this great province. We all must be treated fairly. This great province, we all share. This land holds many stories of success, Mr. Speaker, and these stories come from every region of Saskatchewan including the North and including the aboriginal people.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to outline the philosophy of my caucus. We believe in the free enterprise system, but we also have a strong social conscience to protect those who need protection. Mr. Speaker, it was not the Liberals who dragged this province into debt; it was not the Liberals who closed down 40 per cent of rural hospitals; it most certainly was not the Liberals who balanced the budget by increasing every tax and every conceivable utility.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1615)

Mr. Belanger: — I want to make it completely clear, Mr. Speaker, what a Liberal member is. I often hear members opposite talk about the Saskatchewan spirit. At this point, I plan to write the producer of a TV show that many of you may have heard of called *Unsolved Mysteries*. What I'd like these guys to do is to do a show on the . . . do a special on the Saskatchewan provincial economy, because it's a mystery to me why we're missing the economic growth this province both needs and want.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — But despite this government's regressive policy, I believe the Saskatchewan economy will do well over the next few years. The Saskatchewan spirit is alive and well. It's alive and well in the mines of Esterhazy and the forests of the North and the wheat fields throughout this province, with the Indian bands throughout the province, and especially in the North, and also the Metis communities. This is largely thanks to these people and the rest of the Saskatchewan people and not this government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Just imagine for a minute, Mr. Speaker, what this province could do with lower fuel costs, lower taxes, lower costs of government, lower workmen's compensation rates, and a truly positive climate for business to exist. That, Mr. Speaker, is where the Saskatchewan spirit is — it is with the private sector.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — If I was in government I would get the taxpayers' money out of businesses and Crown corporations because businesses can survive and thrive without government interference if the government simply provides the right climate, a climate that encourages businesses to seize on all opportunities and to build their own successes.

Mr. Speaker, the official opposition cares about the working people. We understand what a mortgage is; we understand what it means to feed and clothe our children. This is why, Mr. Speaker, we must also protect the working men and women of this province. Not through propping up of an artificial economy, not through union-only preference policies, not through needless bureaucrats, but through careful and clear negotiations with business to ensure that our Crown corporations remain viable in this global community. We owe respect to the working people and we must protect them by ensuring that businesses can survive and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, then and only then can we fix our roads, protect our health, educate our children, and provide support for the needy and elderly. This, Mr. Speaker, is what our caucus is all about. It is what government should be all about. And I don't believe we have a choice. I think it is time for aggressiveness and I think it's time for Liberals.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Yes we are inexperienced in the rules of this House, but we're not inexperienced in providing options, ideas, and solutions for the people of this great province. We know it is our responsibility and duty to provide an effective opposition to government. This province cannot be governed without an effective opposition.

Make no mistake, we will come up with our own ideas of governance and we will challenge this government on its archaic methods of governing, but we are not about to showboat or use silly rules to attract attention. We will not merely try to impress the media, Mr. Speaker. Our first priority as a Liberal caucus is to hold this government accountable for their actions. Our priority is to consult with people and develop innovative approaches for this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Let me assure each and every member of this Assembly that this is what the Liberals will do. Our message for the people of Saskatchewan will be clear from here on in.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, at times and especially these times, it is difficult to be a politician, and yes, even a Liberal. But I, like everyone else, knows that anything that is easy is not worth the battle.

Others in this House know the sacrifice and pain of being a politician. However, in our hearts and the hearts of many others throughout Saskatchewan, we'll always believe in what we can become and not be limited by our past.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to offer a heartfelt thanks to my own father who should be with me today, and also people like Raymond Dion who passed on, also from Ile-a-la-Crosse, who really had a great influence on my life; and people like the former member of the NDP, Lawrence Yew, who went through great struggles, health problems galore. And also to my mother who passed away at a very young age. When I was four years old I lost my mother. And also to my family, to my wife and to my children, to my stepmother, and 24 others in my family, that I want to personally acknowledge them today, as they have shared my downfalls and my achievements, including the election to this Assembly.

As well I want to thank the people of Ile-a-la-Crosse for supporting me throughout my years as mayor. And certainly they know my downfalls and my attributes, and there's more downfalls than attributes, but I wish also to thank them for their support.

My victory belongs to them, and a simple thank you is all that I can offer. But my victory also belongs to the people of the Athabasca constituency, the people who have trusted me to come here and start building peace and harmony and begin to provide benefits through politics.

Mr. Speaker, I ask each and every one of the members of the Assembly to start now, to start building on each other's strengths and to leave a legacy of compassion and understanding, as well as a future of successful, tolerant, independent children of all races, religions, and backgrounds.

This is what my constituency is about, and this is what Buckley Belanger is about. It is because of this that I cannot support the motion to approve the Speech from the Throne. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I know that some of the confusion has to be that the minister responsible for Highways and Transportation has just got some new spectacles, and I know that you've obviously confused him a bit with me . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and he's nearly as good looking as I am, thank you very much, the member from Prince Albert.

I want, at this time, Mr. Speaker, to thank you, and I'm very pleased today to enter into the debate.

For the past term, I've had the privilege to serve as a private member of this Assembly and observe with some interest the Speaker's chair, wondering why people like you, sir, would ever be drawn to this type of a job. And after a brief analysis of my interests, I've drawn a couple of conclusions.

First, I see, Mr. Speaker, as speakers being people who have no desire to be inconspicuous, in spite of what you had said in your victory address. Otherwise I would wonder why people like you would dress in long black robes—and by the way, that one is still a little long on you, sir — and that you'd wear that

three-cornered hat that always often leaves one wondering at first glance which direction you're actually proceeding in. And you keep jumping up and down in your chair, monopolizing a great deal of the time in this Assembly, and I hardly see that as being inconspicuous.

And secondly, I think that speakers are people who have never experienced an abusive relationship in their lives, and they see this as an opportunity where they might have one and get paid at the same time.

On a more serious note, speakers and those who aspire to be speakers — and unfortunately we can only have one Speaker — are men and women who serve and demonstrate throughout their lifetimes values and principles that exemplify fairness, compassion, and respect of the highest order for the people in the institutions from which they serve.

And it is with that high regard that I hold both the member from Regina Victoria and you, sir, in. I know that this Assembly will be well served by you and your desire for the dedication to see that those principles and traditions of this institution are maintained and strengthened. And throughout your term, you can rest assured that my personal support will be there as you try to achieve those objectives. And I congratulate you, sir, on your position.

I wish, Mr. Speaker, to also congratulate my colleague from Last Mountain-Touchwood on his election as Deputy Speaker. It appears that this Assembly is beginning to establish a bit of a tradition in selecting members for Speaker's and Deputy Speaker's chair from Last Mountain-Touchwood. And I know the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood very well and truly appreciate his close friendship and association. He has always shown a great respect for the rules and proceedings of this Assembly and will do a fine job as the Deputy Speaker.

I also at this time, Mr. Speaker, want to take the opportunity to thank the member from Moosomin for seeking the Deputy Speaker's chair and to wish him well in his new term. And I admire his respect and sincerity for this institution. I also wish to congratulate all of the members, Mr. Speaker, who have been elected for the first time, and concur with others who acknowledge the honour that is felt by being chosen to represent their constituents.

At the same time I wish to acknowledge my disappointment in the loss of some of the colleagues in the June election campaign. I know they too have worked hard for the betterment of their constituencies, as will all of the new elected members. I know that their accomplishments will be noted and will be recognized as time passes, and I want to wish them well in their new lives and expect to see their presence in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize our new Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Pat Shaw, who for many years he and his family have spent in the community of Yorkton. Yorkton's loss is this Assembly's and Regina's gain. And welcome to the new pages, clerks, and the rest of the staff.

Mr. Speaker, I particularly wish to thank the constituents of

Yorkton for bestowing upon me the confidence and honour to serve for a second term. Although I feel a little lonely these days in red dot . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — My experiences told me that this will not be for ever, and with some hard work you can take this red dot and make it back into a red square.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — As you know, Mr. Speaker, on many occasions that I have a forum like this I always like to talk about the significance that Yorkton plays in this provincial community. And, Mr. Speaker, Yorkton continues to be the fifth largest city in the province of Saskatchewan and it remains the third largest trading area, only second to Regina and Saskatoon. And we warn them that soon we will be encroaching in their area. With the increase of our regional economic development authorities, soon we're going to be incorporating either Regina or Saskatoon. We're not sure yet.

Throughout the period from 1991 to 1995 we have seen steady growth in our city population base. However our retail industry has grown through major expansions. We have seen, Mr. Speaker, growth in two national retail companies and the development of a new national company in our city. At the same time, our small-business development has remained stable with steady growth.

Yorkton is supported by an extremely strong agricultural district. Stability and growth of companies like Morris-Rod-Weeder, Leon manufacturing, along with record sales in our farm machinery sector this year reflect growing confidence in our agricultural sector. This, Mr. Speaker, is a result of our agricultural diversification over the last four years.

For the period of the last four years, we have seen marginal growth in our employment sector particularly in that of our retail service industry and small business. Throughout the past several years, we have seen the growing relationship and partnership with the community and district through the economic development commissions, health districts, and REDAs all working together.

The results of those partnerships have certainly strengthened our region and provided for greater employment opportunities for the future. And this exemplifies the kind of work, Mr. Speaker, that our government has been working on throughout the past term and sets as its target for its new session.

Our citizens of Yorkton continue to be recognized for their hospitality and organizational expertise. During the past term we've had the pleasure of hosting several major sporting events in curling, slow pitch, as well as the first national high school student rodeo.

In 1994, Yorkton hosted the national student leadership conference, the second occasion that we've had the opportunity to host that where it had its beginning in 1984 in our

community. In 1995, our city had the pleasure of hosting the western premiers' conference which was exceptionally well received and acknowledged by all participants who attended in our community.

Mr. Speaker, to stand here in my place today in this House and acknowledge the successes of our community is indeed a great honour for me. I am truly humbled by the privilege that has been bestowed me by the constituents of Yorkton, and I want to thank them for their support and their confidence.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Mr. Speaker, 1995 has been a particularly exceptional, rewarding year for me not only in the fact that my constituents have returned me to this House for a second term, but that Premier Romanow has looked to the constituency of Yorkton to select . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I will have to remind the member, and being a veteran member I know that he does realize this, that we are not allowed to use the proper names of members in the Assembly. And I'll bring that to his attention and ask him to proceed.

(1630)

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Premier Romanow as he looked to the constituency of Yorkton . . . the Premier. I knew that the Premier looked to Yorkton to select me as the cabinet minister to serve in his cabinet. My appointment in November 1995 is particularly gratifying to me and the supporters of the New Democratic Party, because in the history of the CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party) Party I am the first NDP cabinet minister to ever serve the Yorkton constituency and only the second cabinet minister to serve the Yorkton constituency in the 90-year history of this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — I accept this challenge with the support of my constituency and my caucus colleagues. I look forward to serving the people of Saskatchewan with the convictions and the principles of fairness, integrity, and honesty that has guided my life in the past and certainly will in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to at this time congratulate the member from Battleford-Cut Knife and the member from Regina South in moving and seconding the Speech from the Throne. Today I want to join them on their vision, about what they talked, as we prepare Saskatchewan for the challenges of the new millennium.

The next four years, Mr. Speaker, is the blueprint of what Saskatchewan people told us they want as we met with them and spoke to them in our public consultation process last fall and early this winter — public consultations like the one that we had in our city where some 70 people attended, unlike the meetings that I read about and witnessed the Liberals holding across the province where I think five people was considered to

be a crowd.

And I paid some attention to the speech that was given yesterday by the member from Wood River who talked about, and I quote what he says: "We don't really have to go out and consult much more in groups . . ." Well I don't think you need to consult with groups any more either when you only have one to five people who attend some of your meetings. Hardly a group meeting.

Then the member from Wood River talked about, what is it that the business community actually said to you? And so I say to the member from Wood River, these are the kinds of things that the business community said to us. They said that they don't want any more taxes. They said that they want the debt reduced. And they said that they wanted future tax increase . . . or tax rebates targeted. And they wanted jobs for their young people. Those are the kinds of things that the public talked to us about. And I wanted to share that with the member from Wood River because he hadn't had an opportunity to get that kind of reading.

Throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people talk about several themes which are included in this throne speech today. Included in this throne speech because New Democrats talk to people, because New Democrats work with people, and because New Democrats represent people fairly, and consequently . . . And we're given. . . And as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, that is why we have a second mandate to govern this province. And that is why we only have 10 Liberals across the way in this House.

I was somewhat interested in listening to the speech by the member from Athabasca because he was about, I thought, to tell us what a Liberal is, and I don't think he quite got around to telling us that, Mr. Speaker. But maybe on another occasion and another time, we'll get to learn what a true Liberal is. Because I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, that the folks who sit across the way from us really understand what true Liberalism is themselves.

Mr. Speaker, in our consultations and in our throne speech, Saskatchewan people said to us that they wanted our government to focus on job creation and to provide a climate for economic growth — keeping our young people at home, keeping them in Saskatchewan. And we listened to that, Mr. Speaker, and in this term we presented our *Partnership for Growth* document, building on our strengths in agriculture, forestry, mining, in energy, technology, and telecommunication — a plan, Mr. Speaker, that is for the future growth and development of this province.

In our consultations, Saskatchewan people said to us that they wanted the government to continue on its path of no more tax increases and to continue to reduce the debt in this province, the principles of understanding and compassion, and not the slash-and-burn approach that our member from Kindersley talks about when he talks about the Tory Alberta and Ontario governments that he supports.

In our consultations, Saskatchewan people told us that they

wanted our government to reduce the size of our government, services and programs, and at the same time to work closely with municipalities, universities, school boards, in partnership, to begin to restructure the delivery of the services in Saskatchewan; examining new approaches, looking at the old systems that are in place and designing new ways of doing things in Saskatchewan.

Finally, Saskatchewan people told us that they wanted their government to move to the next phase of health renewal and ensure that there is sufficient resources available to improve the way in which health services are provided in spite of the huge reductions in funding by the federal Liberals and the apparent acceptance by them of the reductions by the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, \$106 million less in transfer payments to the province of Saskatchewan this year in health, social services and education. And what's the Liberal line, the provincial Liberal line? It's that you knew it was coming.

Well this week I read the member from Saltcoats saying, and I quote, that people on the health board, and here he's talking about the health board in Yorkton, I believe, are caught in the middle. And he goes on to blame the Saskatchewan Health for their difficulties, blame Saskatchewan Health. Rather than focusing his sights on the cuts from Ottawa, the \$106 million cuts from Ottawa, he says that it's the Saskatchewan Department of Health to blame. And I say shame to the member from Saltcoats.

First you say that we knew that the federal cuts were coming, and then you say that Saskatchewan Health is to blame. Make no mistake that, this member from Saltcoats, that federal Liberals are responsible for these cuts, federal Liberals are responsible for these cuts, and you're encouraging that and supporting that.

Well this Saskatchewan New Democratic government is going to ensure that Saskatchewan people receive sustainable, effective health services — health services that are universal, accessible, and publicly funded.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Serby: — Not the Ralph Klein two-tiered health system, where the member of Kindersley supports and advocates for, and not the federal and provincial Liberals who do not believe in universally, publicly funded health care, who are working currently in partnership with their federal friends to dismantle medicare in this province, not to build it.

Mr. Speaker, in this session we will see enhancements to ensure that we improve and expand our health renewal in Saskatchewan: expand the use of nurses, therapists and counsellors; new legislation to improve the framework permitting health professionals to expand their mandate; chiropractors practising in health institutions; optometrists treating and prescribing; new methods in health delivery in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Furthermore, through additional funding from Crown corporation of SGI (Saskatchewan

Government Insurance), for which I am responsible for, \$25 million will be directed to research, assessment, and treatment in partnership with the World Health Organization, health district boards, and the Department of Health, implementing primary, secondary and tertiary services across the province and assisting in the rehabilitation and approach of neuro-musculoskeletal services in this province.

This, Mr. Speaker, is how our government intends to ensure sustainable health services in the new millennium. Throughout our consultation process, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people talked to us about a more frugal government. Today we know that in Saskatchewan our provincial government is the most effective government per capita compared to any other government in Canada. But we want to do more. In 1993, I believe, we began on a course of restructuring government through the wellness health reform. The focus of this administration is to give communities broader-ranging decision-making powers, because no one knows better about the needs of communities than the people who live within them.

Mr. Speaker, having been born and raised and educated in small rural town Saskatchewan and currently operate a small farming enterprise there, I have seen the population shift from rural to urban Saskatchewan. As our farms have become larger and my generation and yours have sought livelihoods off the farm, we have witnessed the steady shrinking of our smaller communities in spite of the fact that governments of the past have pumped money into sustaining the infrastructures of schools, recreation complexes and hospitals in rural Saskatchewan. Our populations are continually moving to larger centres. Better roadways, better communication networks, enhanced central systems, municipal and regional hospitals, comprehensive high schools, and the larger retail shopping centres have moved all of our populations into larger, urbanized centres.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a fault of government's, but that is a reality of the times, a reality that doesn't just affect Saskatchewan, but affects all jurisdictions across North America. Today, Mr. Speaker, we're confronted as governments and as decision makers with the question of how do we continue to provide the vital services to people when we have limited financial resources and with a large geographic province.

Mr. Speaker, this throne speech challenges our government and calls on the people of Saskatchewan to look at how we can remodel and reshape our Saskatchewan way. This will require us to look at how we have been accustomed to see things done in the past and move to a new way of doing things in the future in the new century.

Mr. Speaker, today we have in Saskatchewan 847 municipal councils and 119 school divisions — an abundance of under-utilized facilities that were constructed in the past three decades that our tax base can no longer support. Today, Mr. Speaker, my department of Saskatchewan Property Management today examines closely its surplus facilities across the province, and we need to redraft how we support the operations of government in future.

At the end of the day, it will be my expectation, Mr. Speaker, to achieve a lower cost for common services through coordination, centralization and administration and reduction of duplicate efforts. These decisions, Mr. Speaker, won't be easy and will create hardship, and I know that in the short term these will be accomplished to the benefit of all in this province.

Last week my colleague, the minister of Crown Investments Corporation, spoke about the Crown corporations review — yet another example, Mr. Speaker, of our government's commitment to provide leadership in our search to ensure that as we prepare for the new century, Saskatchewan is well poised to be an active participant in the global world.

Mr. Speaker, throughout our consultation process, people talked to us mainly about jobs and forming new partnerships for growth in our province. Examining our training institutions' roles and mandates will ensure that we are training and educating young people for jobs in the future, being smarter about what we train people for.

I have a young daughter, Mr. Speaker, who will be graduating next year from a high school institution in my community who is going to be looking at new opportunities for herself. We need to bring educational opportunities closer to students. With the cost of education, being away from home these days, and attending larger university systems outside the province, we want to ensure that we can make those opportunities available to our students closer to home.

Marketing our technology base and expanding our research initiatives will see us move further into the world markets of opportunities and at the same time attract new initiatives in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I'm excited about the redesign of our social programs, investing in our children, and removing families from the cycle of poverty; expanding our work and partnership with first nations and Metis people to foster greater self-sufficiency and new economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, in the weeks and months ahead we will hear the opposition criticize our plan, but yet there will be very few solutions from our friends across the way. But those of us who sit on this side of the House know that in Saskatchewan we have built a very strong foundation and we have returned this province to a solid financial footing.

(1645)

And we have a dream, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatchewan which includes some tough challenges. But at the end of the day we will see a Saskatchewan community with hope, with opportunity, and a community that will be a national leader.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to close. And it's my pleasure to join with the member from Battleford-Cut Knife and Regina South in supporting the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — I want to begin this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, by congratulating you on the assumption of your new responsibilities as Speaker. I listened very carefully to the remarks that you had made when you assumed your responsibilities last Thursday. And I think if they're any indication of what we can expect in the weeks and the months and the years to come, then we have indeed made a very fine choice. And that bodes very well for this Assembly, both for government members and for all opposition members.

And so I commend you on those remarks.

I also want to address a few remarks in opening to the new members who are here. Over the course of the last nine months or so I thought often of your experience, having been elected but not actually seated in the legislature. And I think in some respects it's a shame that you weren't able to assume your responsibilities earlier in that you have almost a sort of half-life politically. Certainly half of your life is in your constituency but it's hard to feel as an elected member unless and until you stand up in this Assembly and speak. And so I very much enjoyed the remarks of all members on all sides of the House and I'd certainly like to welcome the new members here.

As a veteran of the House for a number of years I've already detected a change in demeanour of the House that I think bodes well — not for this place — but for the people of Saskatchewan. And I hope that we can keep that tenor and tone through this session and for the next years to come as well.

The new staff we have here — the Sergeant-at-Arms and the pages — I'd certainly like to welcome all the new staff to the Assembly and express the appreciation of all members for the services that you will be providing to us. In many respects we're lost causes when it comes to tracking down paper or paper clips and for you pages that help shuffle the paper for us and do our bidding and fill our water glasses, we very much appreciate those little things that you do for us because they really are very big things in many respects.

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

Mr. Thomson: — With leave, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comments from the member from Meadow Lake have reminded me that two constituents of mine have entered your gallery: Mr. Grant Gibson and his daughter Adrienne. Adrienne is, in fact tomorrow I understand, having an interview to become a page in the House of Commons, and today joins us to watch our parliamentary proceedings here. And later on today I'll be having an opportunity to meet with her and talk a little bit about what goes on in this House.

So I'd like to ask you to join with me in welcoming her.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY (continued)

Mr. Koenker: — Finally, I want to acknowledge the role that the good people of Saskatoon Sutherland have had in bringing me to this place again. Not all of the people though, in Saskatoon Sutherland constituency. I think particularly of those people who voted in this last election.

I went to a goodly number of homes where people expressed no interest in the democratic process, expressed not only that, but no interest in voting. And that distressed me a bit. I think that we . . . I happen to believe that we have a luxury here in Saskatchewan and in Canada, having a parliamentary democratic tradition, and that for members of our society who are franchised not to exercise that franchise is a really serious matter.

And so I'd like to say to those members of the . . . those individuals in the Sutherland constituency who voted in the last election, both for me and against me, I want to commend you because I think that is what makes the democratic process work. And I might add that in the Sutherland constituency it was a very tough fight; it was a very close race from the beginning to the end. And the outcome was anything but certain, certainly from my perspective.

Those individuals who voted against me in that election, I have great respect for your opinion and for your participation in the democratic process. And I say this because as we look at the world stage nowadays, we see, for example, in Israel some 57 people who have lost their lives in the last number of days in four separate terrorist attacks by Hamas extremists. That's their attempt to influence decision making and public policy, an attempt to wreck the peace-making process in Israel and to destabilize legitimately elected government.

Here in Canada and in Saskatchewan we have a different tradition, one where we believe that individuals can make a difference on the strength of their convictions. And as you said in your opening remarks, we have a luxury here that we don't make decisions by guns, or the decisions in Saskatchewan aren't made simply on the basis of who has the most money or the biggest thugs. But decision making is made in public, with cut and thrust of debate, with an opposition that doesn't use guns or big money. And I say how different here in Saskatchewan from so many places in the world. And what a wonderful, wonderful luxury we have in that regard.

This brings me to the subject of the Speech from the Throne. The last five years have certainly seen many changes in Saskatchewan and lots of controversy. There have been many troubling developments, many troubling decisions that have been made by government in the last four or five years. I must admit I myself have been troubled by some of the decisions my own government has made. And it is often very difficult to put these decisions into a perspective because the pace of change

and the scope of change is just so fast and so inexorable that it's hard for any of us to really know where things are going and at many junctures whether the decisions we make are right or wrong. In some respects we're darned if we do, we're darned if we don't. We're between the devil and the deep blue sea in decision making. Not just here in Saskatchewan but for any government today, the scope and the scale of the problems that we face are just overwhelming, and the speed with which decision making needs to take place, in some respects, I view as a real threat to the democratic process because it doesn't allow for full-scale public consultation, and the kind of public debate that should take place.

And that's why I'm very pleased that there was some consultation, public consultation, before this Speech from the Throne, that the government saw fit to engage in a public consultation process, *Making Choices*, preparing Saskatchewan for the new century, in which a questionnaire was sent out along with accompanying documentation to sort of explain some of the challenges facing Saskatchewan people in the next four years and moving into the new century.

And I might say, in some respects this public consultation exercise almost makes the Speech from the Throne less of an occasion than it might be because so much of what we are really facing was contained in the Speech from the Throne . . . contained in the *MAKING CHOICES* document.

The need for a new partnership in the economy if we are to have economic growth. The need for more diversification in agriculture, the challenge for quality education and social services, the formidable challenge of not just resting on our laurels with health reform but completing health renewal in our province. And engaging in training and preparing young people for jobs into the new century. Working with social services and making government itself work.

I want to say to the people of Saskatchewan, in some respects this *MAKING CHOICES* document is at least as important as the Speech from the Throne in as much as it signals some of the huge challenges and opportunities that we face here in Saskatchewan as we prepare for the next century.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those introductory remarks, I would like to adjourn debate in as much as I have much more to say on another occasion. Thank you very much.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.