

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

**ADDRESS IN REPLY
(continued)**

Ms. Lorje: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is an immense privilege for me to be able to second the Speech from the Throne. I was very pleased earlier today to be able to address this Assembly and to address a few preliminary remarks on this speech. I thank the legislature for their indulgence in allowing me to give my preliminary remarks, and now I want to address some more substantive matters with respect to the Speech from the Throne.

Before I do so though, I want to once again thank the mover, the member from Swift Current. And I want to in the strongest of all possible terms, compliment him on his extremely fine delivery of a very clear and impassioned speech that so articulately outlines the policies, themes, and priorities for this government in this upcoming session. I think he did an excellent job, and I really commend him for the job he did.

Mr. Speaker, the member for Swift Current commented on his constituency. I too wish to comment about the nature of my constituency because there is an interesting contrast between his constituency and mine. His, as he pointed out, is deeply rooted in his particular corner of the province and defined by the singular traditions and attitudes of its inhabitants.

I am as proud of my constituency of Saskatoon Southeast as he is of Swift Current. Unlike Speedy Creek though, most of my constituency is under construction. Just 15 years ago, it was a playground for gophers and the odd deer. We are part of the fine and booming city of Saskatoon and the Corman Park municipality but we have few established neighbourhoods or institutions and the traditions that come from them.

My constituents are relocating their sense of community and cooperation onto new territory. As we move towards a new century, I am confident that they will build strong and healthy communities for themselves and their children.

Before I begin my comments on the Speech from the Throne, I want to congratulate the new member for North Battleford. I wish him all the luck in his legislative duties, and I certainly do not want to intimidate him, Mr. Speaker, by saying that he has a tough act to follow. But the truth is, former MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) Doug Anguish, was renowned for his stubborn and scrappy determination to do the best for his constituents. So the new member does indeed have a tough act to follow. I wish him all the best of luck for his temporary time in this legislature.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it's only two months and a little over a week into 1997 and I've already chalked it up as a year of significant changes for myself. For instance, on January 24 I

observed my 50th birthday.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — I thank all the members for their applause and I want you to note that I said I observed my 50th birthday. I can't quite bring myself to say I celebrated it yet. But maybe in 15 years or so I'll look back and say yes, that was a time of great celebration.

On a sadder note though, Mr. Speaker, on February 14 I noted, with some sadness and a lot of love, the 10th anniversary of my husband's early death from cancer. And just last week, on February 27, I was in Holland, and I held my mother-in-law's hand while she completed her own journey of 84 years.

So for me, Mr. Speaker, 1997 has been a time of significant changes and a time of reflecting on old directions and new pathways yet to come. Therefore for me, the privilege of being asked to second the Speech from the Throne is a rare opportunity to be able to reflect on the twists and demands of both public and personal change.

As I think about these changes, I sometimes find it ironic that when I was a young adult in the '60s I thought and I demonstrated against government of all sorts, at all levels. At that time in the '60s we were labelled radical, left-wing activists. Nowadays, you get called a right-wing reactionary if you rail against big government.

It's really strange because somehow along the way, those of us on the progressive social democratic side seem to have lost track of the notion that the state can never, for very long or very effectively, serve as a substitute for good and just society. We seem to have forgotten — some of us — that bureaucracies, entitlements, privilege, and an unbalanced emphasis on rights rather than duties leads to a weakening of the fragile and precious bonds of strong and healthy communities.

At the same time, people of other political points of view pushed to emphasize the supremacy of the individual over the collective of families, community, civic groups, and co-ops. This is the most noticeable change that I've observed between the '60s and the '90s. It's a very public change, and it shouldn't have been too hard for progressive social democrats to predict the results. If the "me" side gets precedence over the "us" group and then gains control of the apparatus of the state, then of course the politicians of individualism are going to tumble all over themselves with promises of centrally administered programs for personal pleasure — the hot tubs and cheap gas routine of the '80s. And the devil take any concern about today's debt, let alone tomorrow's.

So it is small wonder, Mr. Speaker, that we got ourselves into the bollocks of mortgaging our future and weakening our communities. It's easy enough now with the wisdom of hindsight to look back and to see where our collective society went wrong, provincially and federally. What was not so easy was to put it right and to make sure that everyone was a meaningful part of the solution.

Luckily, as the Saskatchewan people know, we did elect a government in 1991 that had the boldness, the courage, and the decency to begin once again on the process of building a just and prudent, progressive society. In practical terms, this has meant a process of turning just about every cherished notion of social democracy upside down and inside out for awhile.

First, we had to figure out how to get back to good, grey, government — the nothing flashy, non-demagogic, long-term, slow-term, not-in-your-face kind of government that people in Saskatchewan want, used to have, and definitely still deserve. So if people now accuse us of being boring, we shouldn't apologize, Mr. Speaker. We know all too well, to our chagrin, the results of experimenting with a different sort of government. The disastrous \$15 billion debt will remind us of that faulty flirtation for many, many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, slow and sure wins the race; gaudy and greedy sinks the ship.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — You know, responses to the Speech from the Throne are in many ways ritualistic. And don't get me wrong, I do believe that rituals and tradition are very important, as the member from Swift Current said. But what's just as important, Mr. Speaker, is good, steady government and the day-to-day things about good, steady government that affect people's lives.

Saskatchewan has been fortunate. We've been a laboratory for social change of many kinds. Our citizens have been able to see the best and the worst of governments. But at the end of the day what it all comes down to is not a fancy-sounding Speech from the Throne; what matters most is the quality of day-to-day government that emanates from that speech.

So really what this speech, the 1997 Speech from the Throne, is all about is good, grey government. The kind of sustainable, plodding, methodical approach that people need and want. People want to know that the state is there for them if need be but that there is no need for it to be intrusive and in their face. It's there when you need it. That counts for more than all the flowery phrases in speeches from the throne, because really in Canada there is no throne — the throne is the people. Politics, Mr. Speaker, happens day to day as we all know in this House. And we on this side of the House have learned painfully that there is no free ride. We're still suffering from that experiment in the '80s.

So what I want to do today is to give a speech about work — working government, working people, workable approaches. The proof of the success of our approach came with our re-election in 1995. And the proof of the soundness of that approach is being demonstrated today in this legislature with this throne speech and with the upcoming budget speech. Slow, steady, progressive, and not terribly flashy. In many ways, as an hon. member said earlier, boring. But it's revolutionary none the less, because it is government with a solid commitment to investing in people, investing for people, and investing with people. That, Mr. Speaker, is revolutionary.

Now that's not the sort of revolution in government that Mike Harris talks about in Ontario. His revolution, I would suggest, is neither common nor sensible. He takes education off the property tax so that he can pay out a promised income tax cut. He funds this by dumping welfare responsibilities and public health costs onto municipalities unlucky enough to have poor people living within their civic boundaries. Just imagine how welfare recipients could be hounded from town to town to town if municipalities there are forced to fund welfare off the property tax base. That's the system we changed in Saskatchewan 30 years ago. Been there. Done that.

I can tell you from direct personal experience that it is demeaning, debilitating and unfair. We got rid of the welfare on property tax system in the '60s. I shudder to think now that Ontario is embracing that system in the '90s.

Mr. Speaker, telling a 10-year-old to trudge through the snow to a neighbour's farm to separate their cream and churn their butter in exchange for their skim milk might shave something off the welfare food costs for a town, but it is not — it is not — a smart investment in people. It is not fair to fund a middle class income tax cut on the backs of poor people.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1915)

Ms. Lorje: — That sort of approach, Mr. Speaker, is not an investment in people; it is a debasement of people. It may be revolutionary but it is not the Saskatchewan way.

Mr. Speaker, I used to be a municipal councillor in the city of Saskatoon. When I became aware of the rampant debt and disdain for government that had crept into our public process, I decided to run for provincial office. I knew then that we would have to be firm and say no to proposals that took money out of one pocket and stuffed it back into someone else's, but at the same time, proposals that ripped holes in the pockets of the clothing of our children and our grandchildren.

I left municipal office with few regrets and many dreams. I came down here to help out with the task of rebuilding our province's finances and, as we will see when the Finance minister tables, in a few short days, what will surely be yet another consecutive balanced budget, that task is well on the way to success.

I came to this legislature, as I said, with few regrets and many dreams. After five years in government, I have some regrets and fewer dreams. I am incredibly saddened, for instance, that the prescription drug plan is now a mere shell of itself, a pale imitator of a plan. I blame the drug patent legislation of the federal Tories and their pet parrot Liberals as well as the fiscal irresponsibility of the Devine administration.

I am pleased that we managed to salvage comprehensive drug support for poor people, but I still want to see improvements for everyone else's drug coverage when our finances improve. It pains me that cut-backs to the drug plan were a necessary sacrifice to the basic and most important goal — a fiscal fitness

and a balanced budget.

Also with considerable regret, Mr. Speaker, I look around and I realize that we have many swords to swing before we can truly slay the poverty dragon. I take some comfort in the fact that our government alone in Canada has never rolled back social assistance rates and indeed has consistently, through six budgets, brought in measures to help the most vulnerable in our society.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Further, Mr. Speaker, I regret that the pernicious cancer of part-time and low-paying jobs still has a stranglehold on our economy. I am also disappointed that the noise coming from people who want to roll back changes in health care sometimes drowns out the celebration of reforms that give more grass roots control over decisions and places more emphasis on service rather than bricks and mortar. I am impatient as well, in our efforts to reform our education system and to create an economic climate that will lead to full and meaningful employment for everyone.

Yes, I have many regrets. I was rudely awakened from my dreams of a quick creation of a strong and just, progressive society when we, on the government side, were shown the fiscal disaster dumped on the people of Saskatchewan by a supposedly populist government. They believed that government was essentially bad and they set out to prove that it was so.

The cold-water reality of the debt and deficit meant that many of the dreams and hopes of my colleagues and I on the social democratic side of the legislature had to be put on hold for awhile. But again, on reflection, I don't think that this is necessarily a bad thing. I'm reminded of a poignant sentence out of a book called *Cloudstreet* by Australian writer, Tim Winton. One of his characters, an industrious and determined woman, says: "Hoping is what people do when they're too lazy to do anything else."

Well we could have sat back and hoped that the financial disaster of the Devine administration would magically disappear, or we could do exactly as we did: temporarily — temporarily, I emphasize — suspend our idyllic dreams of a New Jerusalem appearing effortlessly overnight. We set about building the basic structure to create it block by block, day by day, the realistic way. It's not fancy just yet. The streets have a few potholes but it is solid and it is the start of a New Jerusalem.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — We started with the foundation. If you build a house, you don't spend all your mortgage money on a pool table for the rec room. No, what you do is you build from the ground up and you furnish it room by room as your financial wherewithal permits.

This is what we did. We put our financial house in order and by the way, we put it in order so that it will stay in place for a long

while. We've rebuilt the province's foundation on firm ground, not shifting sand. So now we have the basics in place. We've worked on the financial and the social conditions to make it sustainable. We've worked on the task of earning trust and confidence for the public interest once again. We've had to be patient, almost as patient as Tommy Douglas was when he started a similar process back in 1994, or as patient as generations of Saskatchewan people and their optimistic determination to leave a better province for their children.

Mr. Speaker, it is a truism but it bears repeating. Politicians have two basic tasks. One is to remind people about yesterday so that it's not forgotten today. Simultaneously we need to explain tomorrow to today so that we can actually move forward to achieve that tomorrow. We have to be rooted in the present, straining for the future, and ever mindful of the past. And that, I believe, Mr. Speaker, has been the strength of the current NDP (New Democratic Party) government.

While many people — and I admit it, primarily people in our own party — criticized us for the fiscal measures we had to undertake, nevertheless we knew that the dreams of tomorrow would be nothing but dust if we weren't wakeful and watchful today. It meant sacrifice by the people of Saskatchewan. It meant many regrets. But as we see now in this throne speech, ultimately it also means a solid and sustainable foundation for the future.

In short, Mr. Speaker, we acted according to the wisdom imparted in Aesop's fable of the crow and the pitcher. It's a succinct story that gets to the heart of the matter, and it goes like this.

A crow half dead with thirst came upon a pitcher which had once been full of water. But when the crow put its beak into the mouth of the pitcher, he found that only very little water was left in it and that he could not reach down far enough to get at it. He tried and he tried, but at last he had to give up in despair.

Suddenly though a thought came to him, and he took a pebble, and he dropped it into the pitcher. Then he took another pebble, and he dropped it into the pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the pitcher. And then he took another pebble and dropped that into the pitcher. And so on and so on. At last, at last he saw the water level rise up towards him. After dropping in a few more pebbles, he was able to quench his thirst and to save his life.

Now the moral of that tale, Mr. Speaker, is simple and it's profound. Bit by bit does the job. That story of the crow and the pitcher is a perfect illustration of the task we faced in 1991 and the value of perseverance and good, grey government.

Mr. Speaker, I said earlier that I have some regrets for the lost programs that had to be trimmed and tightened so that we could get our financial house in order. But equally importantly, I have absolutely no regrets for our solid commitment to fiscal responsibility. In this session our government will demonstrate that five years of hard work and sacrifice by the people of

Saskatchewan were well worth it. The worst is behind us, thankfully. We've cleaned up the mess left by the circus elephants of the 1980s, and we can now, with solid optimism, begin the next phase of investing in people.

The throne speech has six major investment themes: jobs; education; child poverty and welfare; a stable, secure, and caring health system; rebuilding transportation, and underpinning it all with the preservation of Saskatchewan's new-found, but still fragile financial freedom.

These themes are the themes that the people of Saskatchewan told us were important. Curiously, the Liberal Party opposite has many of the same themes. I don't know, maybe that means people talk to all politicians. But equally curiously, the Liberal Party only has four priorities, not six. Their priorities are jobs, education, health care, and potholes.

Now what do they leave out? What about fighting poverty, and what about being fiscally responsible? What kind of a party has no concern for people trapped on welfare? What kind of a party has no concern for children trapped by their parents' poverty? And equally telling, what kind of a party has no concern whatsoever for the financial well-being of an entire province?

You know, deficits and spiralling debt are just one fiscally irresponsible budget away. But do the Liberals feel finances are a priority? No way. They want to spend 400 million dollars on potholes. And they think, they think they'll find the money from savings in health care. Tell that to the front-line health workers, Dr. Melenchuk. It doesn't sound very financially responsible to me.

It is a cute idea to have a 1 800 number for bumps in the road — really cute. But just like there is no free lunch, Mr. Member from Wood River, so too there is no free ride. Pothole patching has to be paid for from somewhere. And unless you can get your buddies in Ottawa to reverse their decision on the Crow rate, the damage to the roads is just going to get worse. And quite frankly, I don't see anyone lining up to pay more taxes for anything, let alone a hole in the road. I really wonder what sort of response the Liberals would get if they put in a 1 900 number where people had to pay to report the potholes.

(1930)

Of course the condition of our highway infrastructure is a problem. But a telephone-complaint line is not the answer. What is needed is a solid strategy, a solid, sustainable strategy to rebuild our transportation system. It's not flashy and it's not in your face. But the strategy our Minister of Highways will outline this session will be solid, sustainable, and affordable.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — And that is the sort of program the people of Saskatchewan want and deserve. Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats in this House have worked hand in hand with the people of Saskatchewan for five years to restore the fiscal health to the province. We have reached our goal. Our credit rating is good. We're paying down the debt, and we are now

ready to invest in the future.

This throne speech is all about investment, and I think a little bit of definition is in order. What exactly does investment mean for progressive social democrats such as the government members in this House. Mr. Speaker, for me and I believe for my colleagues, investment does not mean intrusive state government. It is not the place for government or politicians or anyone else for that matter to tell families what they should value, read, or eat. It is, I maintain, the function of government to provide the very best possible atmosphere for families to make their own decisions on these matters.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we will have government investment in people, but it will not be the sort of government-knows-it-all kind of investment that many might expect from a social democratic government. It's not reactionary to say this — it is progressive. At least it was in the '60s, and if we can shape up some of the fuzzy thinking of the '90s, it will be so again.

The role of government is not to solve problems for people. The role of government is to create a climate where people have fiscal and social resources and access to power to be able to solve their own problems. At the same time, when we talk about investing in people, we do not mean that we will cavalierly leave it all up to the private sector to decide who they'll invest in, when, where, and why.

Private finances, quite properly, are mostly about profit. When we talk about investment in people though, we know that the private-profit motive and cash alone aren't sufficient. Resources are often, indeed usually, more — much more — than financial. Social resources as well as capital resources are important when you're investing in people. So the private sector alone isn't and shouldn't be expected to be up to the total task.

There's another sector though, Mr. Speaker, in addition to government and private interests, that needs to be involved in the strategy of investing in people, and that is the sector loosely and variously referred to as civil society — the clubs, the unions, and the voluntary organizations that add up to the whole notion that we call community. It's larger than mere self-interest.

Community, at its simplest and most basic, means people joined together by shared needs and a desire, individually and collectively, to improve their opportunities for the future.

Community isn't a place, it isn't an object — community is a practice, and the practice of good community isn't created by elitist profits. The job of politicians who care about communities is to foster dialogue that builds communities, especially those that emphasize positive values that maintain diversity — diversity of culture, of dreams, and of deeds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — Strong communities recognize the value and the importance, not to mention their own enlightened self-interest, in helping others. That's why when we talk in this throne speech about jobs and reducing child poverty, we know how

important it is to level up wages and benefits for everyone. We refuse to accept the currently fashionable rush-to-the-bottom approach. Further, we know that reducing poverty will improve the quality of community life and reduce the fears of job loss, crime, and social unrest for everyone, not just the poor.

Everyone benefits from this. It's not a case of the poor, beleaguered middle class being squeezed again. A model to reduce poverty that is based on all of us investing together is much more than the traditional nanny state that has caused so much resentment in the past. It is community and individual self-reliance, and it brings the state back to a more reasonable level of involvement.

This is what the child action plan is all about. It means investment in people by government, the private sector, and most importantly the civil society sector. And that is our investment strategy for Saskatchewan people and this throne speech sketches how we will make it happen.

I'm excited by these initiatives, Mr. Speaker, but I am saddened that the federal government is not a partner with us. The federal Finance minister has continued his budgetary, time-released pill strategy, by budgeting on the backs of poor children in Canada.

It may seem to be smart politics to go into an election saying he cares about poor kids, and has a national child benefit plan in the works. But the glib promise will just feed public cynicism and it certainly won't feed hungry kids. He had a chance to bring in the first new national program in 30 years. Instead he's made it a hostage for the upcoming federal election.

I give him notice, Mr. Speaker, that we will be holding him accountable for this. In 1993 the Liberals promised to scrap the GST (goods and services tax) and to introduce a national day care plan. After the election, "pht" they changed their mind. Will they do the same thing with the national child benefit plan? I'm very concerned that they will.

Well Saskatchewan cares about those poor kids waiting for an election ploy to play itself out. We care today, not a year and a half from now. We're not going to sit back and hope for a program in late 1998. We are going to work with communities, inner city neighbourhoods, rural areas, and northern communities to build on the child action plan for children.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — We will create the tools so that people can help themselves together as a community. That is investment in people -- solid, progressive, workable and sustainable investment.

Totally on a different topic, Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased in these days of bean counting and obsession with the bottom line, that our government has the wisdom to recognize the importance of the arts to society. One of the most exciting things in the throne speech is the plan to create a single arts agency. This will be the most fundamental reform in an important sector in our society.

In 1947 Tommy Douglas created the first publicly funded, arm's-length Arts Board in North America. And now in 1997, our NDP government will open a window for creativity for both amateurs and professionals, volunteers and arts companies, with the single arts agency. It will be an opportunity for this province to excel in an aspect of human endeavour that is most memorable for society.

I know that it's fashionable these days to focus mostly on economic development and to ignore the incredibly meaningful and wonderful contributions the arts makes to our lives. But frankly, economic development without art is industry without imagination.

When people look back to the end of the 20th century here on the Prairies, they're not going to remember the hamburger joints and the shopping centres. But they will remember the artists and their works. People like Laureen Marchand, visual artist; Bill Epp, sculptor; Anne Szumigalski, poet; Greg Daniels, playwright; Robin Poitras, dancer; Gail Bowen, writer; Brenda Baker, musician; Maria Campbell, film-maker; and many, many more.

These are the people creating the memories for tomorrow. These are the people who encourage us to be bold and confident. They are all people who recognize the wisdom in the words of the Russian poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky. He said: "Art is not a mirror to reflect the world, but a hammer with which to shape it." It is my hope and expectation that the new single arts agency will be the plank for the hammers of the diverse and talented Saskatchewan artists.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lorje: — And just to remind the members opposite who think that art is some guy down at the pub, the arts prime the economy at the same time as they lift the soul. They are an important building block of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Swift Current said that the stories of the Book of Genesis still resonate for us today because of the deeply human quality of those stories. Another story from another mythology speaks to us in a different, but equally significant way. The ancient gods had the story of Sisyphus, the man who angered the gods and was condemned throughout eternity to roll a huge stone up a steep hill, only to have it slip down from him at the top and roll down to the bottom. He had to start again and again and again.

It's a simple story but it's an instructive one, especially for those of us in public life. Consider this: for nearly 40 years, with a long, lean, seven Liberal years in between, CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) and NDP governments rolled that rock towards the summit, moving towards the strong, new society that generations of Saskatchewan people desired, slow step by patient step, as I said earlier.

By 1982, Saskatchewan had reached the point where universal social programs and social democratic economic achievements were about to be phased . . . merged into a phase of

development which Allen Blakeney called beyond universality. This was the phase where the nagging, specific, difficult programs not susceptible to universal approaches would be targeted — problems of wage disparity, gender discrimination, educational inequality, and so on.

As Blakeney said, in Saskatchewan we knew how to deal with problems of poverty. It was time for us to learn how to deal with the problems of prosperity. We were poised to reach the top of the hill. That was in 1982. History will show that the rock broke the sound barrier as it crashed to the bottom. So here we are again, Mr. Speaker — not at the top, maybe not even very close. But through the heroic efforts of the people of Saskatchewan and their government, we're moving upwards again.

(1945)

And here I think is where I would like to close. I know, as did Sisyphus, that the rock may never get to the top. No human endeavour — individual or collective, public or private — is ever completely perfect. It is entirely possible, maybe even likely, that what we've accomplished together will not prevail for ever.

But this is what is important: we tried. We are trying. We are pushing that rock towards the top with every ounce of social democratic strength that we can muster. Along the way, we've done a lot of good. We've repaired a lot of damage, and we've made a difference. Of that I am sure.

I think my colleagues will agree with me when I say that the portion of grace that we may achieve in our efforts comes from the trying. The claim that we might have to any sort of historical permanence comes not from the finality of our work but from its diligence and its sincerity. The great French writer, Albert Camus, said that we can imagine Sisyphus eventually smiling at his task, realizing that it would never be finished, convinced that its value lay in the attempt.

We are working, Mr. Speaker, to bring about a better society than the one we inherited — a society of fairness, opportunity, and equality in the workplace, in the home, in the school. Because I am convinced of the validity of our work, I will gladly second the motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise before the Assembly and speak to the motion of address in reply to the throne speech.

But before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to also mention a few preliminaries. This is the first opportunity that I've had to welcome some new faces to the legislature, and I'd like to, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, extend a welcome to the new pages that will be helping throughout this session. Without them, the work would not go on in the legislature, and I know they attempt to make it so much easier for us. To Michael Dowie, Claire LaBelle, Guy Turton, Daniel Abramson, and Lyle Cowles, thank you very much and we look forward to a

very good session.

With the start of the second session of this twenty-third legislature, Mr. Speaker, it also reminds me — and I'm sure all MLAs that live a significant distance from Regina — that this is also a very special time for our family members. The fact that most of us leave our homes on Sundays and travel into Regina and do not return until Friday places additional responsibilities on spouses, on children.

And on my own personal behalf, I would like to thank my wife Gail and my son Bryce and my daughter Lindsay for taking on those extra responsibilities and for ensuring that the things get done when I'm away. And I'm sure that the other members extend those sincere appreciations to their family members as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to extend a very hearty welcome — and I would say a very healthy welcome — to one of the members opposite. I know that many of us face very trying times at various times throughout our lives, and when I had a discussion with the Minister of Highways not too long ago I realized the kind of situation that he was going through, having incurred something very similar in my own time. I told him that, for the moment, I'm living proof that indeed life only gets better. And I want to extend to the member of Carrot River Valley a very sincere welcome. And I know last Friday's debate tells me that he's ready to roll for this particular session. So I extend that to him.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, I also — like the member for Saskatoon north east, I believe — want to thank you personally . . . Southeast, I'm sorry, Saskatoon Southeast. I would also like to extend to you my appreciation for the tour that you took throughout the schools in Saskatchewan and especially those schools in Canora-Pelly constituency, one at Canora and the one at Foam Lake.

I know in talking with the students in terms of the kind of program that you put before those students, that indeed that is a great way to bring to the young people of this province a greater respect for politicians and indeed a greater respect for this institution and the work we do. And I want to thank you very much for being there.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, as this speech signifies the beginning of a new legislative session, it also signifies a new beginning for the official Liberal opposition. We now have a year of experience under our belts as the official opposition and much has happened since we last addressed the House. A new leader, Dr. Jim Melenchuk, has brought a fresh focus to our efforts, and I'm sure it won't be long before he joins us here on the floor in the Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to welcome a very special member to the

Chamber, the MLA for North Battleford, who has become the newest member of our official opposition team. During the next several years all members of the House will learn what I have learned over the past few months: that this gentleman is extremely capable and competent in his new capacity. He will make a very strong addition to public debate, fighting for the province of Saskatchewan. And we are very pleased and excited to have him aboard. Best wishes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — I understand that several of the members opposite have been telling the member from North Battleford not to get too comfortable in his seat here at the legislature. For once they're right, Mr. Speaker. He shouldn't get too comfortable because, after the next election, we'll be all moving across to those seats. Then we'll see who will be looking for a new chair outside the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, when the people of this once NDP stronghold elected a Liberal to the legislature, we know they were sending a message to the government: no more cuts to the hearts of our communities, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — In electing a Liberal, North Battleford citizens were electing a representative who would stand up and defend them, not another back-bench New Democrat who has forgotten how to speak up, not another back-bench New Democrat who pats the Premier on the back while he closes local hospitals. There are enough of those in the legislature already.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — During the nine months, the nine long months that this government hid from the public making decisions without open debate in the legislature, we in the Liberal opposition kept very busy listening to the people of Saskatchewan. What we have discovered is that the sentiments of voters in North Battleford towards this NDP government are echoed throughout the province.

Saskatchewan people are being ignored. They are sick of this government's arrogance. They are sick of tightening their belts while the Premier loosens his. And they are sick of having big government try to control every aspect of their lives. This is the message they have asked us to deliver, Mr. Speaker, and we will not let them down. We are here to make a difference and, believe me, we will make a difference.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — It would be so easy to sit in this Assembly and be lulled into complacency by the NDP's throne speech. According to this government, our province is in a suspended state of bliss. They would have us believe that we should be sleeping easy, our nights filled with dreams. Well let me tell

you, there are sleepless nights for thousands of families and their dreams are more like nightmares.

I'm referring to the people who are up all night worrying because they can't find work and don't know how they will feed their children. They aren't buying the government's dreams. The people who watch their life savings slip away thanks to the burden of government over-taxation in their communities, they aren't buying the government's dreams either. And the people who are driving hundreds of miles to get their sick child medical care because hospitals have closed and doctors have left, they certainly aren't buying the government's dreams.

How disheartening this throne speech must be to the people of Saskatchewan. How many times have we heard those same old buzz-words like strong foundation and fiscal responsibility, only to be disappointed in the end result? How many times have we heard from this government that Saskatchewan has turned the corner, only to study the figures and realize that we haven't even left the starting blocks? How many times have we given the government's . . . have we been given the government's promise only to find out that their word isn't worth a dime?

Mr. Speaker, just as this year's throne speech indicated that the government's first priority is jobs, last year's throne speech indicated the very same priority. Yet the government's performance in this area is certainly sluggish, placing us well behind the status of our neighbours. Although the latest StatsCan figures show that a late surge resulted in an increase of 7,000 jobs in Saskatchewan this past year, the same report also indicated that Alberta witnessed job growth of 31,000 over the previous 12 months. And the recent Manitoba throne speech announced the creation of over 23,000 new jobs during the same period.

Our government's dismal record in this area means we are well off the Economic Development minister's promised mark of 30,000 new jobs by the year 2000. Imagine how upsetting this must be to our young people who are faced with a jobless future when they graduate from high school or post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the StatsCanada report of last Friday confirms that the unemployment rate for the age group 15 to 24 in 1996, the month of February, that percentage was 11.6, and in February of 1997 that percentage has risen to 13.3.

The Saskatchewan private business sector would dearly love to lead the way in job creation but they cannot do so as long as this government continues to keep its foot on the economy's brake.

A recent study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business shows that our province's entrepreneurs cite high taxes and oppressive government regulations as two of the main factors hindering their performance. This government has promised tax cuts in the past but has yet to deliver. We must not be close enough to an election yet.

Moira Wright of the Saskatchewan taxpayers association points out, and I quote:

The contempt for taxpayer continues. As long as we have such arrogance from our leaders, as long as politicians continue to believe that they have a bigger and better claim to spend your hard-earned tax dollars than you do, the spirit of enterprise will not thrive here as it could.

My colleagues and I certainly echo these sentiments. Small businesses and consumers are denied tax breaks by the NDP at the very same time millions of dollars are being given out to firms like Intercontinental Packers, Sears, and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce — hardly the nation's business basket cases. Where are this government's priorities, Mr. Speaker?

(2000)

Last year I brought to the attention of the House a constituent named Leonard Sebulsky, the owner of the family general store which has been an institution in the town of Sheho since 1906. Leonard's greatest concern was the oppressive business regulations imposed by our provincial government which were driving him out of business.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the government committed itself to decreasing red tape by 25 per cent over the next 10 years, which really isn't much of a commitment at all if you think about it. In fact it's more so like a store having a half-price sale after it's doubled the prices.

But how did the government then proceed to carry out this promise? In September of 1996, a 250-page document was released regarding occupational health and safety which increased the number of OHS (occupational health and safety) regulations from 373 to 494. What a great start. Does the NDP keep its word on any promise?

Over the past few months, Leonard Sebulsky's complaints regarding government over-regulation have been repeated to me by many other Canora-Pelly entrepreneurs whose businesses are being suffocated by government red tape — Ernie Babinchuk of Hyas Garage, Terry Houston of the Northstar Esso in Canora, Florian Slogocki of Buchanan's Central Garage — they each have a problem stemming from the oppressive rules of the Department of the Environment and Resource Management. Don Yasinski of Crispy's Chicken and Ray Lussier of Chugger's Bar in Canora are both caught in the red tape of the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority. Ralph Ager of Preeceville Implements and John Oystryk of Canora's Active Accounting have complaints regarding the stifling regulations of the Workers' Compensation Board.

These business owners and many others across Saskatchewan want me to deliver a message to the provincial government: get your noses out of their small businesses.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — They will be especially disappointed that the

topic of government over-regulation received no attention in the throne speech.

Yet despite the facts, Mr. Speaker, the government speaks very glowingly in the throne speech about its commitment to economic growth and job creation. I'd like to remind the Premier of the words he spoke in 1988 when he was the leader of the opposition. He said:

We have more unemployed in the province of Saskatchewan today than we've had in recent years. We've had young people who are now entering their last weeks and days of school, looking for graduation, and now looking for jobs, anxiously looking for jobs. And this process for young people has not just begun. It's been going on for weeks, and no jobs to be found.

Well, Mr. Speaker, after six years of NDP government, this situation hasn't improved one bit. The only difference now is that futile job searches have been lasting for several years, not several weeks. Mr. Speaker, the Premier knew there was a problem then, and I can only assume he knows there is a problem now. My question is, why isn't he doing anything about it? Where are this government's priorities? Where is the leadership?

The government is so busy stirring up these magical dreams of prosperity, it has failed to address the very real, long-term problems that the lack of jobs has created. It prevents healthy, capable people who want to work from supporting their families. In some cases they are forced to go on welfare, and sadly the child poverty rate increases.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased that the throne speech focused on the reduction of child poverty. I can only hope that this is not another of the government's empty promises. Providing this is a serious commitment, we in the official opposition will be eager to work alongside the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan to end this tragic social problem. Indeed this devastating increase in poverty affects every community in our province. Unfortunately it hits our aboriginal sector even harder.

Let me read a section from the Regina *Leader-Post* a few weeks ago. Doug Cuthand speaks:

Welfare has the ability to sap a person's strength, lower expectations, and create a climate of hopelessness. Welfare has become a serious problem in first nations communities and it's a serious challenge for leadership.

Has this leadership come from the government? Simple answer is no, not in this throne speech.

On Thursday we heard talk of the wonderful things this government has done for the agricultural economy and for rural Saskatchewan. Talk about living in a dreamland, Mr. Speaker. You'd have to be an NDP die-hard to claim that this government has done anything to improve our rural way of life.

Publicly the NDP speak glowingly of good deeds they have

done for small town Saskatchewan. Behind closed doors however, they sing a different tune. Consider the words of Dr. Lewis Draper, a former NDP, who saw the inner workings of this government. In a letter to the editor of the Regina *Leader-Post* several months ago, he warned, "Rural Saskatchewan is in a double bind. The NDP doesn't need our votes, so they will continue to ignore us."

Remember also the leaked internal memo from the Minister of Economic Development. It stated: "There was and still is no intention to provide a grand strategy for rural Saskatchewan." Remember that? Mr. Speaker, if this is the case behind closed doors, why does this government continue to pretend otherwise? They do not intend to provide employment opportunities for our rural residents and they have certainly not done so for urban citizens either.

Of course the members opposite will shrug their shoulders and say, oh well, jobs are a federal issue, because they are so fond of playing the blame game. But I'd like to remind them that it wasn't the federal government that made the promise of 30,000 new jobs by the year 2000; it was the provincial Minister of Economic Development. The New Democrats made the promise and now they better be willing to deliver.

Jobs mean strength, security, and self-sufficiency. The provincial government must take care of Saskatchewan people, and that means providing them with access to employment opportunities.

Already, Mr. Speaker, the statistics have shown that our government's dismal job-creation record is beginning to have long-term, negative effects on our province. Saskatchewan has lost an entire generation of its youth to other provinces where jobs are available. We are educating our children, then forcing them to find employment elsewhere — what a shame.

The only thing which seems to be slowing the steady stream of young people leaving the province are the terrible highways, which are too treacherous to travel.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — According to the Canadian Automobile Association, in 1988 the province spent 94 per cent of the revenue it collected from fuel taxes and motor vehicle registrations on highway maintenance and repair, the intended purpose for the gas tax in the first place. As of the last provincial budget, Mr. Speaker, that figure had dropped to approximately 35 per cent, a loss of nearly 60 per cent.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I hear the government in its throne speech promising renewed emphasis on provincial highways, I must say they certainly have a long way to go to catch up to the cuts they have already made. Late last month, the official opposition established its pothole patrol hot line. Since its inception, the phone has been ringing off the hook. Concerned citizens from every corner of the province are calling in with horror stories of our once proud highway system. I have personally received calls about the deplorable conditions of Highway No. 310 near Foam Lake and Highway No. 8 north of

Norquay, which has been likened to a cattle trail with massive amounts of potholes.

Consider some of the other comments we have heard on the hot line: "Welcome to Saskatchewan where everything is flat except the highways." Or, "In a five mile stretch I counted 210 potholes." Or, "I would like a politician to go for a ride with me and try to carry on a conversation on the road."

Mr. Speaker, our provincial highways have become a national joke. The throne speech mentions that the government plans to promote tourism in Saskatchewan. Why bother when so much of our road system is virtually impassable in many areas? Unsafe highway conditions may seem trivial to the government, but they are creating havoc in rural communities. It's time the New Democrats took our deplorable highway conditions seriously, and we will certainly be reminding them of that responsibility throughout the session.

Some of the most vocal critics of Saskatchewan's highway system are school bus drivers worried about safely transporting our children between home and school. As a parent these complaints certainly concern me.

However as the official opposition critic for Education, I have received even more disturbing phone calls and letters regarding the schooling of Saskatchewan children in the face of provincial funding cuts and rising expenses. I'm well aware of the sacrifices which have been made by students, parents, teachers, staff members and school boards. The frills are gone, Mr. Speaker, and as cuts continue, we have seen major damage to our education system.

I want to share with the Legislative Assembly a few excerpts from various letters I have received detailing what is happening to our education system under this NDP government. Keep in mind these are statements that have been made by education professionals, Mr. Speaker.

The first commentary is from Dianne Gordon, secretary-treasurer of the Kindersley School Division. She writes:

As capital expenditures continue to be much less than is required to maintain the educational facilities throughout the province, students and staff are forced to work in environments which are not conducive to learning and are in direct conflict with the occupational health and safety standards, as well as non-compliance with fire codes.

Mr. Speaker, these are our children we are sending to these facilities, not cattle. If these types of horror stories do not convince the government that something is wrong with their priorities, then Heaven help us.

Ms. Gordon also states:

There is something drastically wrong with the way education is funded in this province. That we are forced to continually accept lower standards after striving for so many years to build up our education system goes against

our strong desire to be the best that we can be. How do we raise our children to become our future and fulfil the hopes and dreams of tomorrow if we can no longer offer them the opportunity to achieve these goals?

(2015)

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have seen the province's share of funding for K to 12 education drop from 60 per cent of total costs down to its current rate of 40 per cent, with local taxpayers forced to back-fill the remainder. That has prompted this angry response from Ralph Eliasson, the director for education in the Long Lake School Division, and I quote:

Our board firmly believes that the nearly 60 per cent local support for education does not reflect the commitment that the Government of Saskatchewan needs to have to the young people of our province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this lack of commitment to education by our government has resulted in a great deal of turmoil. Schools are being closed, teachers fired, courses discontinued — all corners that are being cut at the expense of our future and our children's future. In the meantime, leadership from the provincial government through this difficult period has been sorely lacking, non-existent.

I received a letter from Mr. Bill Fraser, the chairperson of the board of education for the Wilkie School Division, discussing his board's frustrations in trying to deal with a shrinking budget and an insensitive Department of Education. I quote:

We have tried to implement an alternate school year, initially suggested by the Minister of Education, only to have the same minister refuse to follow her own protocol for our proposal. It's extremely difficult to work in an environment which blocks division initiatives while failing to provide provincial leadership.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — The Turtleford School Division has also experienced the lack of leadership demonstrated by the provincial government. Its board chairperson, Judy Helperl, writes:

To indicate that there will be changes . . . particularly in rural school divisions, without any more leadership than has been provided . . . is causing a good deal of stress and I might add distress in rural Saskatchewan. Historically, this has not been 'the Saskatchewan Way'.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech promises that the government will refocus on education, but I have seen many times how adept the Minister of Education is at juggling figures. In fact she and I have locked horns on these issues of funding cuts and lacking leadership numerous times. You can be assured that these confrontations will continue until this government takes real action to make the K to 12 and post-secondary education of

our children a priority once again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Lacking leadership is a prominent trademark of our NDP regime, but nowhere has it been more evident than in the provincial government's treatment of Saskatchewan municipalities. Last session the New Democrats tried to take a big stick to local governments and force them to amalgamate, but municipalities stood tall and refused to be steamrolled and we in the official opposition were very happy to have helped them in their efforts to halt the absurd district services Act. And we are sure that this Act remained on the order paper and was not passed.

As I stated earlier, Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is masterful at playing the blame game. True to form, the Premier offers stinging criticism of Ottawa for lowering transfer payments to the provinces, despite the fact that the federal government is still working to eliminate a \$19 billion deficit. Yet he has no problem in turn slashing provincial funding to municipalities by \$38 million — nearly a 50 per cent cut. But when asked why he is so severely slashing grants to municipalities rather than making sacrifices within his own government, the Premier quickly changes the focus of his attack and blames someone else. At a recent NDP convention, he remarked upon his funding cuts to municipalities by saying that if local governments couldn't find savings within their own administrations, that they had to jack up property tax rates. Then: "I guess they have to make those decisions individually."

Shame on the Premier, Mr. Speaker. When the people of Saskatchewan need leadership, all he's interested in doing is passing the buck.

I have a great deal of contact with municipal leaders in my constituency on this matter. Mayor Gary Sawatzky of Preeceville states in one letter:

The revenue sharing cut for 1997 will trigger our local taxes to increase, thereby making it impossible to maintain revenue neutral budgets during the legislated property assessment re-valuations. The local taxpayers will have enough problems dealing with managing the local tax shifts under the reassessment without any added provincial cut-backs.

Mayor Sawatzky's disappointment is echoed in letters from Mayor Steve Kitzan of Buchanan, Mayor Ray King of Foam Lake, and Lorraine Kaminski, the administrator for the village of Rama. These civic leaders have each expressed concern of the government's handling, or should I say mishandling, of property tax reassessment. They realize that the old system was outdated, but they looked to the province for leadership, and instead found a leadership vacuum at the top and were pushed away to deal with the public outcry themselves. Patrick Dergousoff, the administrator for the town of Canora, offers the views of his council on the NDP's handling of reassessment, and I quote:

Council is of the opinion that the province was lacking in

the leadership it provided with this very contentious issue. Once started, progress was slow and the direction vague. Too much had to be done in a very short time at the end of the process. It takes time for councils and then the general public to orientate themselves to new concepts and ways of doing things. Many are still struggling.

Mr. Speaker, you will receive this very same response from municipalities around the province. The NDP has sought to play the old game of divide and conquer. They deflect blame to municipal governments when tax bills increase, and pit rural taxpayers against their urban counterparts when controversy arises over the education tax.

So very little was mentioned in this throne speech regarding our municipalities and the sacrifices they have made under this government. This is very disheartening considering the important role they have traditionally played in Saskatchewan life.

This was billed as the NDP's redemption throne speech, kicking off a session in which they finally loosen the purse-strings and put money back in Saskatchewan. Judging from what was said on Thursday, I sincerely worry for the fate of the province's municipalities. It appears as if they will continue to be viewed by this government as little more than potential scapegoats.

The game of divide and conquer was also played by the NDP during its gutting of our health care system. Throughout that process the New Democrats have been very cunning. They provided continually shrinking budgets for front-line service provision, then watched from a distance as neighbouring communities fight amongst themselves to save their hospital beds or their nursing homes rather than banding together and focusing on the real culprits, the provincial government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — The New Democrats have even included a safety feature in its health care destruction strategy, establishing puppet district health boards to act as its fall guys. The health boards have provided a cushion, allowing the provincial government to dictate cuts without being held directly responsible for those affected. That's quite a scheme, Mr. Speaker, obviously.

Last session we provided documented cases of how deep health care cuts are devastating the people of Saskatchewan. These were examples from real people with real fears. But in typical NDP fashion, the only response from the Minister of Health was, blame the federal government or blame your local health board. In fact, blame anyone else but us. How out of touch with reality this government has become.

The members opposite claim through the throne speech that they have done such a fabulous job of health reform; that the system is now strong on its new foundations. Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't attempt to build a granary on the foundations the NDP have provided, let alone the health care system of an entire province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, if we had believed the government members over the past several months, we would think that their health care reform was a huge success. If you were to ask the average citizen, however, you would hear a very different opinion.

People don't need to read billboards posted by the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses to know that there is a health crisis. They see it every day in their communities. Saskatchewan people are scared of what has happened to their health care system. They are scared that there won't be a bed for them when they need it. They are scared that their rural doctors are leaving the province in disgust. They are scared that their nurses are being overworked. In short, they are scared to get sick or grow old because they don't trust this government to maintain adequate health care services for them.

And who can blame provincial residents for their scepticism? I have been contacted by people like Betty Kluk of Norquay, whose elderly mother, Dora Harasem, is confined to a wheelchair which she can no longer move because she is too weak. Mrs. Harasem has been found numerous times lying on the floor, just trying to somehow get over to the bathroom. Yet despite her serious, deteriorating condition and months of anguish, she had been unable to secure a home care bed within the Assiniboine Valley District until this past January.

I have also heard from people like Helen Harkness of Foam Lake, whose severely disabled son will no longer be allowed to receive respite care in the Foam Lake health care centre because there is no money available to provide someone to look after him.

And I have heard from several constituents, like Verner Sikorski of Sturgis, who has had to put his life and his teaching career on hold due to the constant pain he feels. In the meantime, the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) he requires before back surgery keeps getting pushed back further and further, as there are too many patients in the system and not enough capability to handle them.

These Saskatchewan citizens want to know how this government has let things get so bad so fast. Mr. Speaker, we will certainly be asking the members opposite that very question throughout the session.

I would like to repeat for the members of the House the words of the Premier when he was in opposition in 1988. At that time he stated:

I want to say about medicare, after six years of administration by this PC government, we have a sorry record in health: 11,000 people waiting to get into a hospital bed; we've got a pharmacare program which has been gutted; we've got a children's dental program which has been dismantled and the substitute program is nowhere to be seen; we have doctors in revolution almost against this government's approach; we have nurses who are understaffed and overworked and they're tired and they're

harassed and nobody listens to them; nobody over there listens to them. They're pleading for some additional assistance. We have a mess on our hands in the health care system.

Unfortunately those words ring as true today as they did in 1988, except the waiting-lists have grown longer, and the doctors and nurses are even more overworked. Health care is still a mess, and this Premier has only made it worse.

(2030)

In the throne speech we hear that a strong economy and fiscal stability mean stable and adequate public funding for health care. I would certainly hope this to be the case, but I'm not holding my breath. If the government expects to throw a token amount of money at the health care system in an attempt to appease Saskatchewan citizens, then they will be in for a rude awakening.

I assure you, this session we will continue to bring these examples forward in the House day after day until the government finally takes positive, long-term action to reverse the damage it has done to Saskatchewan health care, and people can once again feel secure with health care in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, these are the types of things we have been hearing from Saskatchewan citizens during our consultations. While the government has been hiding from the public, huddled up in its closed-door meetings, provincial taxpayers want us to deliver these messages. They are tired of the broken promises which seem to be a daily problem with this government —GRIP (gross revenue insurance program), VLT (video lottery terminal) revenue sharing, school board funding, job creation. The list goes on and on.

You are not only providing false hope for the people of Saskatchewan, you are betraying their trust in their elected representatives. This will have detrimental effect for decades to come, as confidence lost is doubly hard to regain. They are tired of the lack of leadership. School board, civic, and health care officials are furious with being made into scapegoats. You were put in office to lead the people of Saskatchewan, not to mislead the people of Saskatchewan. When you put forth government policy which affects the province, stand by it. Don't leave someone else twisting in the wind taking blame for your actions.

Saskatchewan citizens are tired of the government's divide and conquer mentality, where cooperation and consultation are needed instead. For once during your term in office, look past what is politically expedient and do what is right for the long-term benefit of Saskatchewan.

Cooperative community spirit is what built this province — rural and urban; neighbour and neighbour. These relationships are absolutely essential in Saskatchewan. Do not continue to drive a wedge between these provincial partners for your own gain. Provincial residents are tired of this government being out of touch with Saskatchewan people. A constituent remarked on

one of the Deputy Premier's many trade junkets, stating: "He's more concerned about the weather climate in Mexico than the business climate in Saskatchewan."

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — You aren't responding to the wants and needs of Saskatchewan citizens because you either don't listen or you don't care. Either way the problem has become academic.

The people of Saskatchewan are tired of this administration's big government arrogance and hypocrisy. I still find it hard to believe that the Premier chastises municipalities for wasting money on administration overlap while he maintains two portfolios of Education and two portfolios for gambling. And nobody wants to see any more of the Premier's buddies, college room-mates or former law partners play musical chairs for patronage appointments or watch as hefty raises are continually given to Jack Messer and Carole Bryant after SaskPower rates have been hiked and services cut to improve the corporation's bottom line.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Krawetz: — And Saskatchewan citizens are tired of this government taking credit for improving the province's finances when it's their pockets that have been picked and that they are now the ones struggling.

The NDP has taken great pleasure in attacking the previous government for its financial record, and I agree. The Progressive Conservative record is pathetic, but let's look at the figures a little more closely, Mr. Speaker.

The 1986-87 *Public Accounts* show that the provincial government incurred expenditures of roughly \$4 billion. Revenue was much lower at \$2.8 billion — 1.35 billion of which was collected in taxes. Compare these numbers with the 1995-96 *Public Accounts*, which show expenses of \$5.1 billion and revenues slightly higher. However the portion of revenues comprised of taxes sky-rocketed to \$2.85 billion, more than the entire provincial revenues collected nine years previous.

This is hard-earned money which used to be in the pocket of Saskatchewan citizens, Mr. Speaker, money which they used to spend in local businesses and invest in Saskatchewan enterprises, money which now finds its way into the hands of the Premier to be redistributed as he sees fit.

The New Democrats have not cut down on government expenditures one dime. In fact they are spending more now than ever before. The only difference between this government and the last is that the Devine Conservatives chose to run deficits to spend on . . . to finance their wild spending spree while the New Democrats would rather tax Saskatchewan citizens to death.

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Saskatchewan are plain and ordinary people who don't demand much from their elected leaders. All they ask for is honest, responsive, trustworthy government which will provide them with fair taxation, the

opportunity to prosper, and adequate basic services like health care and education.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been a total failure in each of these categories and this throne speech offers little to suggest they are trying to improve. The people of Saskatchewan have lost their confidence in this provincial government and I am committed to speaking on their behalf.

So, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support the motion before us today as it currently stands. Therefore, I move, seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the hon. member from Melville, that the following words be added to the motion:

but calls upon the government to make a change from its present course and embark upon a better policy; a policy which will renew the Saskatchewan people's hopes and optimism for the future by showing leadership and commitment; a commitment to build this great province through vision, through meaningful consultation, and through long-range planning; planning that meets the needs, priorities and aspirations of the people of this great province.

Mr. Speaker, I do so move.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to enter into this debate tonight, particularly given the very detailed and insightful amendment that the opposition leader has moved. I was dozing off there a little bit as I was listening to him tonight but woke up to find out it wasn't actually a nightmare, it was simply a continuation of his speech that I was catching.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start tonight by welcoming the member for North Battleford to this Assembly. It's a pleasure to have a new person join us here in the Chamber. I think that that always changes the dynamic a little bit. And I hope that he finds this to be as enjoyable and interesting a place as I have found over the past 18 months.

If I could offer any advice to the member for North Battleford, I would simply harken back to the words of Disraeli, who said that if you're not too clever, it's often better to be conciliatory. And I think that these are probably words that we should all bear in mind as we go through these debates, particularly as the members often, I think, come forward with what they believe to be great vim and vigour and great ideas on how things should be. It's much different when you're actually tasked with having to govern the province. It's easy to be the Pollyannas that some of the people opposite are. And I think we need to remember that.

There is something to be said for being conciliatory. I think there is something to be said for remembering to being humble and modest, and I hope that the members opposite don't lose that in the arrogance and the interest that they have in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, I, in welcoming the member for North Battleford, am reminded of another Liberal member who joined this House in the last session, that being Anita Bergman. I hope that this member for North Battleford's time is as enjoyable and brief as hers was. As such, I welcome the interim member for North Battleford and look forward to obviously debating him.

The other people I want to congratulate as we start this second sitting of this session are in fact the members opposite who have recently sought the Liberal leadership. I want to say this quite sincerely: that I do think it is quite an important part of our democracy to ensure that internally within our parties there is in fact change and renewal, new ideas, and some new approaches brought forward.

The members opposite, I think, and I say this again in all sincerity, I think really did — those members who ran — did bring forward some very interesting ideas and did help change the debate in the province.

In that regard, I want to welcome the Liberal opposition leader, the member for Canora-Pelly, in his new duties. I notice tonight that we're not joined by the actual Liberal opposition leader. I assume that's because his caucus office lets him go at 5 o'clock. I assume there's no budget for him to be here on overtime, as the member for Sask River says.

Mr. Speaker, we laugh at that to a certain extent, but I have to tell you it concerns me to a certain extent as well. When this government came to office in 1991, I remember the words from the very first Speech from the Throne that were delivered, and it promised in December, 1991 to restore honesty, integrity, and competence to government; that honesty and integrity was in small things as well as the large.

And I know at the time one of the pieces that was under debate and under some scrutiny was in fact the recommendation from the Provincial Auditor, who was being quite critical of the previous Conservative government for hiring staff to do certain jobs and then sending them off to constituency or caucus offices to work in a different capacity.

To be quite honest, Mr. Speaker, it worries me some that we see this Liberal opposition employing a similar tactic to employ their leader. I say that not as a cheap partisan shot, but simply because I do think we should have learned something from the Tory years; that these sort of, whether you want to call them cute or whether you want to call them deceitful activities, this playing with the rules, I think, really does in many ways demean all of us. And I would really hope that the members opposite would find another way to deal with this issue.

I appreciate that the Liberal leader is not in fact a member of this Assembly, that he does want to play a role. I'm not so sure that we should be bending the rules of this Assembly to allow him to be working as a caucus office researcher when clearly that's not what he is doing.

(2045)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think that to a certain extent . . .

An Hon. Member: — How are they funding their 1 800 lines by the way?

Mr. Thomson: — That's for a whole . . . another speech, member for Saskatoon Southeast, how they're funding their 1 800 numbers.

But I think we need to take a look . . . Having listened to the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Canora-Pelly, tonight, I want to go back and talk about some of the things in fact that this throne speech that was presented does do to promote hope and optimism in this province in a very realistic sense. And I want to read to you a section of it that I was quite impressed by. During the speech the Lieutenant Governor said:

We are showing that a people who hold true to the values of co-operation, community, mutual aid and responsibility:

can return from the brink of bankruptcy;

can preserve and renew the foundations of civil society, like Medicare and education; and

can build a growing, competitive high-employment economy,

without regressive transfers from the poor to the rich, and without undermining essential supports for our families.

I think in many ways that sums up very clearly what this government has attempted to do not only since members like myself joined in 1995, but it really attempted to do since 1991.

In that regard, when we talk about a couple of the pieces that have been discussed to a certain extent tonight — and in particular, I want to talk about how there are in fact different models and different opportunities and different choices governments can make — and I think there is a good, a very good, set of case studies.

The Leader of the Opposition was talking about a case study that they had done. Let me talk about the case study the Canadian people have done. They've elected a New Democratic government to govern Saskatchewan. The people of Canada have elected a Liberal government to govern the country. Faced with many of the same problems, faced with deficits, faced with difficult debt problems, faced with having to deal with the same interests from the same set of voters, well, these governments have dealt with these issues very differently.

And I think that that's an interesting point to start from tonight in terms of how these two different governments have dealt with these competing interests, and I think have dealt with them very differently. We as a government and as a party, have opted on a course -- I think a fairly conciliatory approach -- and one which we believe is balanced. Our overriding approach has been to ensure that competing interests are balanced; to ensure that we look after the various sectors of our society, particularly

the poor, particularly children, particularly those who have been left out of the economy in the past. That's been our choice. Now we look at how we've done that.

Let me talk for a second about the question of jobs. What we've strived to do over the past five years and what this throne speech outlines that we are interested in doing in this session is that we want to bring forward a comprehensive, made-in-Saskatchewan plan that will help Saskatchewan people get ready to enter the labour force in a meaningful way, to connect, to have jobs, to create jobs and to be able to participate fully in our economy.

We have done that, I think fairly successfully, through programs like Youth Futures and JobStart. I think we've done that rather successfully through our training strategies in SIAST (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology). I look at how, on the other hand, Ottawa has dealt with this same problem. While we've attempted to put more money into our education system, while we've attempted to bring people together, bring stakeholders together, to bring together our communities, Ottawa's divided them. They've divided provinces — pitted them against each other. They've pitted various stakeholder groups against each other. They've pitted communities against each other. I think that's wrong.

We listened to the Leader of the Opposition tonight talk about the situation of youth seeking jobs. But he forgot to mention some of the very important things that the federal government has done. This is a set of issues that are very important for me. These are people that obviously I still feel a fair affinity with. Many of my friends are still in universities. Many of the people I know are out there looking for jobs still.

And I think one of the points that the Liberals fail to mention is the fact that the federal Liberal government in Ottawa is not interested in cooperating with Saskatchewan. It is not interested in working with governments that are not Liberals. It is not interested in protecting people that don't live in Liberal ridings.

And I think we need to make that very clear. The proof is this. This year because of actions taken by Ottawa on post-secondary education, 4,000 — 4,000 — Saskatchewan people will be denied adult basic education. That is solely a responsibility of the federal Liberals. Four thousand people will be denied basic adult upgrading that will allow them to participate in the labour force in a way that the rest of us take for granted. These aren't simply seats; these aren't simply positions; these are people. And yet, have we heard a word from the Liberals? Not a word. We didn't hear a word last session about it; we haven't heard anything yet.

Beyond that, we have a Liberal government that was not satisfied to simply cut 4,000 people out of adult basic education. They cut 1,200 apprenticeship positions. The Liberal leader stands up tonight and says that he's interested in seeing that young people are able to participate in the job market. He says that too many of them are going to Alberta. Well I'm sorry, that's not simply the case, and the Liberals are incredible in the true sense of being incredible — lacking credibility on this issue — when they come forward and they can cut 4,000

people out of adult basic education, cut 1,200 people out of apprenticeship programs, and then they turn around and say it's a provincial problem. I don't think so.

What happened to the situation that we used to cooperate as a nation? What happened to the approach where we used to look at people not based on federal voters and provincial voters, we looked at them as simply being Canadians and Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that what we are going to see this session from the Liberal opposition, despite the new leader, despite the fact they say they've got a new beginning, is still the same old rhetoric. And it is a flip-flop. Because we're going to see them saying on the one hand we should be doing more, and like their motion that I'm speaking to tonight, it'll be completely devoid of detail. It won't have any meaningful suggestions. It will simply be nice pie-in-the-sky rhetoric.

And I think we have seen that even in question period. As I listened to the interim member from North Battleford stand and ask his questions, I don't hear any concrete suggestions for change. I didn't hear any in the so-called emergency debate that the member tried to lead on Friday. I haven't heard any from the member for Melfort. I haven't heard any from the member for Wood River. I certainly haven't heard anything from the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

There's nothing being offered except for saying, we'd do it better. But when we look at it, when we look at what the Liberal record — is where the Liberals have governed — we see that you don't do it better, you do it worse. You talk left wing and yet you exclude people who are not in that establishment class, that are not in that working class. You cut them out.

How else do you explain the fact that you've stayed silent on the 4,000 people who were denied adult basic education in this province, in Saskatchewan. How do you explain that?

Mr. Speaker, let's move off of that education piece, because when we talk about jobs and the economy, they say oh, there's other pieces there. That's true; there are. We can talk about taxes. And let me talk about that for a second.

The Leader of the Opposition stands tonight and says, well the province is bringing in more tax money. A previous Liberal leader used to say that that was the way we should do it. You grow the economy and more people will pay taxes. It couldn't be that the economy is growing; it couldn't be that the economy is any better.

I mean when we take a look at it, and we take a look at the number of people working, we know there are many more people — more than 10,000 more people — working now than there were when we came to office. We know that — what were the stats for last month? — 7,000 more people; 7,000 more people working than a year ago.

But it can't be that these people are working, earning an income, and paying taxes. No, no, no, that can't be it. So

somehow between the time that we lost the member for Saskatoon Greystone as the Liberal leader and we now have the member for Canora-Pelly as the Liberal leader, somehow this has changed. No longer can you simply increase your provincial revenues to provide programs by growing the economy. Is there some other fiendish, evil plot at work here on our side. Obviously, I don't want to dwell a lot on this tonight because I look forward to debating this once we get into the budget because I think there's a lot of contrast and comparison here.

I of course want to mention again the fact that the Liberal opposition has refused to join with us in opposing harmonization of the GST and PST (provincial sales tax). I want to make the point, as we did last session, that in fact they support this harmonization. They support transferring \$400 million worth of taxes by the consumers.

So do you think that's going to have an impact? Do you think that's going to make a difference on the individual working families? I listen to the interim member from North Battleford talk about poverty, and I wonder how much better off are those people going to be under a Liberal regime that has them pay 15 per cent on everything or 16 per cent on everything. How does that help them, member for North Battleford? I simply don't understand how this makes things any better.

The whole question here I think comes back to one of credibility. And this is one of the pieces I think we're going to have an interesting time debating this session, is who is better equipped to govern Saskatchewan in a way that the people want. And I would say to you, based on the platitudes and the rhetoric that I've heard even two days into this session now from the Liberal opposition, that we know it will be the folks on this side who are making the tough choices, who are balancing out the various interests and demands, and we are listening.

I want to tell you, Leader of the Opposition, that we are not hiding behind the closed doors. The only closed doors I've been hiding behind for the past six months are those of constituents of mine who invited me into their homes to tell me what their priorities are.

And let me tell you this — let me tell you this — that we have recently . . . as I tabulate through the results of what people have written me with, people say to me that one of the most important things they want to see happen in this province is they want to see the debt reduced. They say that. You tell us we spend too much time on the fiscal agenda, but people are worried about it. This is something — another place — where I'd say that the Liberal Party I think fails to understand.

Well let's talk a little bit about the budgets here. We've got a federal government; you say well the federal government has the same problems. Yes, and they've been dealing with it now for four years. Have they balanced the federal budget yet? No, not once. Not once. In fact the federal deficit has ballooned to \$600 billion. That's the way the Liberals govern. And in the process, what happened? Where were the cuts? Seventy-three per cent of the cuts they made were to health, education, and

social programs.

Great social agenda. You should be smiling, member for North Battleford, at the great social compassion that your party is showing in Ottawa . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I'll tell you, member from Melville, I appreciate your interjection but if you concentrate and look at what is happening in Ottawa, if you were to support the Saskatchewan people, if you were to stand up for Saskatchewan people, we would all be better off.

Why is it impossible for you people to stand . . . you stand and you attack us on health care and yet you say not a word to Ottawa. How is it that we know there have been 73 per cent of the federal cuts have come to health, education, and social programs and yet you don't say anything? Not a word. The only people that are standing up for Saskatchewan are on this side of the House.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — I don't want to dwell on budgetary issues tonight because I know we'll have a chance to debate this in a few days. But I say, you take a look at the priorities of this government, the New Democratic government here in Regina, in Saskatchewan, and you compare that with the Liberal government in Ottawa that governs federally and you see where we spend our money.

Fully 71 per cent of our program spending goes to health, education, and social programs. Do you want to take a guess on what the federal amount is? You want to take a guess?

(2100)

An Hon. Member: — What is the federal amount?

Mr. Thomson: — Seventeen per cent.

An Hon. Member: — Well where do they cut?

Mr. Thomson: — Well let's be generous. Let's be generous. Let's take out the amount they pay to debt. It rises to a massive 24 per cent. Not even a quarter of federal expenditures, excluding your deficit payments, their interest payments, goes to social programs.

Well I would be very interested to know what exactly are they spending the money on, because Saskatchewan people . . . and the Leader of the Opposition, The Leader of the Opposition, I think, has made this point clearly tonight, what Canadians are telling him, what Canadians are telling us. And whether it is in their role as Saskatchewan taxpayers or Canadian taxpayers, it doesn't matter. They're interested in the same thing.

An Hon. Member: — There's only one taxpayer; you've got that right.

Mr. Thomson: — That's right, because there's only one taxpayer. And what they're interested in is maintaining their health services; they're interested in making sure their schools are good for the kids; they're wanting to make sure people are

able to find jobs through training; and they're wanting to make sure that the needy are looked after.

Well when I look at a massive commitment of 24 per cent of the federal budget, excluding deficit payments, to that I have to say: whose priorities are wrong? Whose priorities are wrong? The New Democratic government in Saskatchewan that commits 71 per cent of its program spending to those three areas or a Liberal government in Ottawa that commits only 24? My question . . .

An Hon. Member: — Who's responsible for education?

Mr. Thomson: — Oh but now we've got the Leader of the Opposition saying who's responsible for education. He just tells me there's only one taxpayer. We are in agreement that these people have the same interests; they have the same set of priorities. Why do we constantly worry about that? There's a reason there are cost-shared programs in place, Mr. Member.

An Hon. Member: — There were cost-shared programs.

Mr. Thomson: — There were cost-shared programs. At one point, that's right, there were. But there's a reason why that was the case, and it was because we recognized that Canadian people wanted social programs. They wanted to be able to protect their families. They wanted to be able to protect the poor because that was part of what made us Canadian.

And I think we should take a look at this. Mr. Speaker, I am actually reminded of the fact, and I think in many ways, although the throne speech addresses the six provincial points that this government attempts to introduce, we need to remember that they are also six federal points that are extremely important to us. Because Canada is a federal system and we want to rebuild it, we want to renew it, and we want to make it strong again.

The Premier's position, he's been very clear on this, and I support this fully, and I would suggest that the members opposite should probably jot this down if they haven't already made a note of it. Federally what we attempt to do is the same thing we want to accomplish here at home. We want a commitment to a strong social safety net. We want a cooperative debt management plan, a national investment strategy, comprehensive taxation review, improvement for the working conditions, wages and benefits, and workable changes to Canadian federation.

That's the second half of the agenda. It's the agenda we need to pursue in Ottawa as united Saskatchewan people in order to be able to protect those things that we cherish here at home in Saskatchewan, like health care, like medicare, like education, and like social services and other social programs. And those are the very things that we hear nothing from the Liberal opposition on . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Mr. Speaker, I think even the interjection from the interim member from North Battleford saying, will I eat for \$4 tomorrow, shows how absolutely petty the approach of the opposition is.

What we need, what we are striving to do, is to build an agenda

for change that will start here in Saskatchewan and will roll to Ottawa so that all Canadians are able to benefit from the same good programs, the same good quality of life that we have here in Saskatchewan. Join us on that. Don't sit there in your seats with your hands under your seats. Join us.

Takes me a minute to calm down here and remember the importance of . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . my conciliatory approach, that's right. And I had promised to stay on for this year. That's right. I did promise a kinder, gentler member from Regina South this session.

Mr. Speaker, there's one other issue I want to address tonight, just briefly. You know I feel so . . . one of the members asked, where are the Tories? Why am I not picking on them tonight? I feel so sorry for them. You know I figure we should just leave them alone for a little bit and, you know, I'll pick on them very soon. But I'll tell you I think at this point there is not a person who does not turn on the TV set and who doesn't take a look at what's gone on or think about the terrible situation we're in and not remember the Tories.

But what we need to be careful of — and I think what people need to remember — is that there's not a whole heck of a lot of difference on that side of the floor because we've seen this in Ottawa. Brian Mulroney could only have dreamed of putting in an agenda like Jean Chrétien is doing in Ottawa. And I'll tell you that someday, if the Liberals are ever on this side, Grant Devine will be saying the same thing, that they would never have been able to believe that, the right-wing approach of that Liberal Party.

Mr. Speaker, if there's any doubt about that — I'm sorry. Mr. Deputy Speaker — if there's any doubt about that, I think we only need to take a look at what's happening directly in health care and the differences between what we saw with caucus researcher, a.k.a. (also known as) Liberal leader Jim Melenchuk, in terms of his views on district health boards, his view for the medicare system in Saskatchewan, his view for a hospital system in Saskatchewan.

And I think this is a very interesting compare and contrast because what we have here is we have a very anti-democratic approach. We on this side of the house believe communities need to make decisions. They need to come together. They need to work together. To do that, we have introduced district health boards, elected district health boards, elected . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . I can assure you, member from Melville, that in all of our wisdom, as much as we liked her, I don't think we would've ever appointed Anita Bergman to the Regina District Health Board. She was elected.

Now in terms of the elections, I think what we need to remember is this. The elected health boards we have generally stayed out of. They have the responsibility to listen to their communities, to make their decisions. We don't always agree with their decisions. I certainly don't always agree with their decisions. But nevertheless, we respect the fact they're a democratic institution of local government.

What do you believe? Yes, what's the first thing that the

Liberal administration will do under Dr. Melenchuk? Well I don't hear anything from the other side of the floor, but let me jump in and answer it for you. In case you've lost your script, opposition members opposite, I would remind you that your stated position is to abolish the health boards . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . It's to abolish the health boards. Why don't you just admit to that?

This is the difference that we have. We are democrats. We believe in communities coming together to make choices. You aren't. You're going to close down the district health boards. You're going to take that control out of the community and you're going to pull it back down here to Regina, directly under the control of the Liberal administration.

Some of the members say that that's just like the Tories. Actually I think that's worse than the Tories. The Tories at least . . . even though they had 450 of these boards, they had to have at least somebody in these communities dealing with them.

But what we have here is a case where you're prepared to abolish, simply abolish, a whole level of local government. That is unheard of, absolutely unheard of that you would abolish. Why, because the doctor knows best? Because you know best? Is that why?

I think we don't even need to go back to the debate we were having about funding priorities and the difference between the federal Liberals on health care and us. We've never cut the health care budget. I would remind you that we spent — what is it we spent? — \$1,600 per capita on health care in this province, one of the highest in Canada.

An Hon. Member: — It is the highest now.

Mr. Thomson: — The highest, the highest. I'm corrected. I stand corrected.

But we are providing this money. When we heard . . . we were out in the community, we understood that there was a feel that they needed more money. We responded, yet we get condemned by the members opposite for using a special warrant to provide more money for health care. Well isn't that interesting?

So we've got a group of Liberals opposite who want to abolish the district health boards. We've got a group of Liberals opposite that say no, we shouldn't have put more money into health care this summer. We've got a group of Liberals opposite who support their federal cousins in cutting — cutting — health care dollars to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very interested to see how this session plays itself out because I think when the dust settles on the Liberal side of the floor, what we are going to see, once the chairs stop rotating, once they figure out who's doing what job over there in that Liberal caucus, I think that what we will see is that it is the same Liberal agenda that is being played out in Ottawa.

And I'll tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that is not an agenda

that is good for Saskatchewan people. I will tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not an agenda which is good for Canadian people. And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is not an agenda that these people on this side of this House will ever endorse.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude tonight . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, I forgot to mention I really . . . The other group I'm thankful for are my colleagues here in the House. They make giving my speeches most difficult because they're so helpful, but I appreciate that.

I simply want to end by again reading that passage from the . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — I want to thank the members opposite for their warm enthusiasm tonight. I simply want to conclude by re-reading this point and saying that this is the reason we should defeat the Liberal amendment, and we should support the motion proposed by the member for Swift Current early this afternoon in his excellent remarks providing much of the philosophical grounding as to why I think we are pursuing the agenda that we are in this province.

And I also want to thank the member for Saskatoon Southeast for her ever-thoughtful comments. I say that very sincerely because there are folks who often get caught up in day-to-day political matters, and I have always appreciated the fact the member for Saskatoon Southeast takes the time to sit back and think about where we're going as a society, and I think that that really is a very useful endeavour.

Bu, Mr. Speaker, I again want to remind the members opposite that in the throne speech it says:

We are showing that a people who hold true to the values of co-operation, community, mutual aid, and responsibility:

can return from the brink of bankruptcy;

can preserve and renew the foundations of civil society, like Medicare and education and;

can build a growing, competitive, high-employment economy,

without regressive transfers from the poor to the rich, and without undermining essential supports for our families.

The day may come when this model too — and the values that underlie it — will find its way into our country's national life.

I only hope that as we move along in that direction that the Liberals will find their feet under them and stand up for the people of Saskatchewan, as we are doing on this side of the House. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's nice to be back in the halls and walls of this great Assembly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as always it was a pleasure and an honour to hear the Lieutenant Governor Wiebe speak. While his speech was admirably delivered, I'm afraid that there was little substance for me to comment on, and it's hard to reply to something with no content.

I would like to take a moment, though, to offer a warm greeting to the new MLA for North Battleford.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I believe his combined drive and intelligence will serve the people of North Battleford and this province well.

I must admit though, we were somewhat lucky in winning that seat because, from what I understand, the weather had something to do with his victory. The weather was supposed to be quite a bit worse for the NDP supporters than it was for the Liberal supporters.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the third party for lending us a number of their voters, and I'm sure in '99 they'll once again lend us many more when we form government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — I might mention too that the Leader of the Third Party spent just about a month previous to the by-election in North Battleford, and I'm thinking that if he had've spent two months, we might have had all their people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our province faces many problems and governmental inconsistencies require addressing. I am in regular communication with the citizens of my constituency and they have asked me to bring to your attention their concerns. This, along with my own observations, causes me to stand before you tonight. I think the single most upsetting feature of our current government is its arrogance.

(2115)

Regardless of how loudly the people cry out, their words appear to fall on deaf ears. Whether their voices come as 7,000 signatures in protest to the government's health care cut-backs to cries of objection about the loss of schools and school programs or the reminders of past promises now broken, none are given credence. When asked about the possibility that life-saving fire-fighting equipment be freed from the burden of the provincial sales tax, the response was that it won't happen.

Well the previous NDP premier wasn't listening either and look what happened to him in 1982. History is about to repeat itself again, electing a Liberal government in 1999, and, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, a landslide? I think so.

This government, instead of taking such things seriously, sit back and claim that these complaints and concerns are merely media hypes or exaggerations that serve the self-interest of the opposition. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is absolute nonsense.

The people of this province know what the priorities are and they should. They live them every day. The people of Saskatchewan know that change is necessary but believe that it must be done in a well-thought-out and organized manner.

Health care is one of the number one issues. Our electorate shows, in this government's own polls, their continuing lack of faith in this government's abilities to manage our health care system. People are feeling betrayed and frightened as cuts continue. Broken promises reign supreme as we hear of further hospital bed closures in both Regina and Saskatoon after reassurances that this wouldn't happen.

The people want to know how these hospitals are to be expected to handle the larger demands on their time and space now so many of our rural hospitals have closed, and if more and more beds are being shut down. Where is the logic in this?

Then more planning . . . more poor planning is proven in the problem surrounding rural citizens in my area who require dialysis. As it stands now, people in my constituency have to travel two, three times a week to Regina for treatment in all kinds of weather and regardless of cost.

My office and the people of my constituency have repeatedly asked that a dialysis treatment centre be set up in Yorkton — Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would ease the suffering and hardship on many of these people — and the response to this that we received back is that it's too costly and there is no funding for this project, even though the equipment is already there.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to show the people of Saskatchewan that their health care is important, because for my people to drive 600 kilometres three times a week to Regina is just unsatisfactory.

Mr. Speaker, all of this talk of poor planning brings up the issue of the new assessment tools handed down to the municipalities. I think all can agree that reassessment was probably long overdue, but it appears that the system of implementation and the logic behind many of the valuations have been found to be poorly thought out.

First, too little time has been given to local governments to absorb the impact of these changes. Many municipalities did not receive their figures until the latter part of '96. Rural municipalities are still reeling from the shock of these figures. Small town hotels, for an example, some of whom have been there in their communities for longer than any of us can remember, have been assessed value increases to such a height that the owners may be unable to keep the doors open if required to pay the taxes based on the current figures.

I believe that the intention of this reassessment was to create a fair level of taxation. Instead, inequities have been created and huge tax shifts have taken place. The ratio of increase in the assessed values of farm land have been far greater compared to that in the villages, towns, and cities. At this point, rural municipalities are fighting for their lives and have been pitted, though, against their urban counterparts.

Like every other big issue in this province, the urban and rural communities have been set at cross-purposes to each other. Is it this government's intention to keep the people of the province fighting amongst themselves so that they won't have the time or the energy to unite against this government's high-handed actions? Does this government not realize without proper tax tools to soften the blows, businesses will close, housing starts will come screaming to a halt, and many low income seniors and families will be forced to leave their homes?

We need to rewrite the tax reassessment legislation to be able to address the concerns of local governments. On top of all of this, local governments are facing huge cut-backs in revenue sharing and are being forced to find money elsewhere. This government regularly blames all its ills on the federal downloading and then turns around and does it over and over again to our same municipalities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bjornerud: — To make up for lost revenue, local governments will be forced to increase their own mill rate, causing greater hardship to those who have seen their assessments dramatically increase. Cut-backs — does it ever end, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Why is it that money can be found for the salaries of those surrounding our esteemed government officials, but not for health, local governments, education or highways? Why is this government not setting an example of good management itself? Salaries of close to 100,000 per annum are common amongst the highest-position bureaucrats. Patronage, something that this government cried out against when it was in opposition, is now a regular part of its function. These seem to be the government's priorities — keep their friends happy and surround themselves with enough highly paid staff that the common man wouldn't stand a chance of being heard.

Education is another subject near and dear to my constituency. The frustration just never ends. With the continued cuts to education, we are quickly losing our edge in the world market. If schools are closed, teachers cut, programs are not available due to the lack of money, how can anyone believe that the quality of education in this province will remain unaffected? All taxpayers are drowning under the load of the school tax and yet school boards are being forced to increase their mill rates to keep their budgets in the black. Whose responsibility are our schools? Who is it that stands to lose should our children not receive a proper education?

In my constituency alone five schools are slated for closure — five schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All over Saskatchewan this is happening. The children affected by these closures will be

expected to travel much farther on roads that are already deteriorating, attend classes that are already overcrowded, and because of distance, not be able to participate in many after-school activities that would broaden their education. How can we expect our teachers to probably teach classes of 30 or more students? Any assistance they might have received will not be forthcoming as cut-backs will decrease also the number of teachers' aides.

How many more children will slip through the cracks and end up without an education? How will these children manage to find jobs without proper skills? What will this do to our Social Services budget? How will we be able to compete in the world markets without properly trained and educated employees? How are the communities affected by these cuts supposed to attract new business when regular health and educational services are not available? Where is the long-term plan? Does this government have any answers to these questions? I mean real answers, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And, if so, both myself and the people of this province would like for once to hear them.

All of the cut-backs to education and health will lead to more and more use of our public roadways. Once again the issue is planning. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government collects approximately \$400 million each year from gasoline tax and registration revenues. With this being the case, why is it then only 168 million went directly into the maintenance of our highways and roads? Where is the rest of the money? Certainly not in additional funding for education and health, nor in the coffers of our local governments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recently the federal government announced that phase 2 of the infrastructure program would be made available to the province and municipalities. How can this government endorse the program while at the same time fully realize the difficulty local municipalities will have in taking advantage of it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to repeat something I said in November of '96 in the hopes that this government will hear and absorb my words. Local governments cannot endure a \$20 million reduction in third party funding, a \$17.6 million cut to the municipal revenue-sharing pool, and still be expected to maintain their respective road systems. The money has to come from the revenues taken from the gas tax and vehicle registration. This is what it was designed for, and that is what it should be used for -- nothing else -- highways and rural roads.

One through Saskatchewan has to be twinned to avoid a bottleneck disaster as drivers enter the province. I wonder how many prospective tourists we lose each year as road conditions force people to go south around us. Winter always brings terrible road conditions, but these have been made worse by staffing decreases in crucial rural areas.

Our own pothole patrol has been flooded with calls from all over this province with horror story after horror story of treacherous road conditions.

The threat of closure of many short-line railways will only make the situation completely intolerable in many areas. What

this province needs is a sensible transportation policy, one that considers short-line railways as a true part of the overall transportation system. I would like to see this government put in place a plan to promote the development of these lines and a long-range policy for our entire transportation system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the most difficult to understand is our finances. The oil and gas industry is thriving, potash is doing well, as is our uranium industry. Grain prices were high and hopefully they go up again. Cameco shares were sold for \$350 million.

This government has reaped the benefits of all this wealth and yet the debt is not being paid down. Cuts continue year after year. Job creation is dismal in this province compared to our neighbours. We are exporting our most valuable resource, our young people. And, Mr. Speaker, do you really know how bad it is in this province? I'll tell you. The geese even left the city. And you know, with our high taxes they probably won't be coming back.

All this points to the fact that this province is being mismanaged. I believe that this is as simple as that — poor planning, downloading, and setting our people against each other. Mr. Speaker, I think it is high time this government got out of their respective offices and listened to the people. They may be surprised at what they hear.

In the rural areas a certain belief is growing stronger each day. The people are afraid that their communities are being destroyed purposely. If one looks at the facts — loss of schools, hospitals, doctors, closure of government offices, closure of short-line railways, heavy land taxes, continued downloading, tremendous provincial taxation, horrific road conditions, and a history of broken promises — one can see their point.

What is the government's real agenda? Certainly this government has proven not only its lack of compassion for rural Saskatchewan, but has launched and is undertaking the complete decimation of it. What they have forgotten is that many of our city dwellers have come from rural Saskatchewan and still have family there.

This government is casting away the roots of people of this province and they both may be urban and rural. I do not understand the lack of vision. Rural Saskatchewan could and should be the land of our dreams come true, but continued decreases in services and financial burdening will not bring this to pass.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the remarks of one of my constituents. In light of what has transpired in rural Saskatchewan in the past few years, she has said this to me.

Maybe what this government would like to see are two super cities wherein all the people in Saskatchewan move to either Regina or Saskatoon, and leave the fields to lie fallow and the towns to fall into the ground. Then this government could donate the rest of our province to Canada as its largest natural park.

Mr. Speaker, these sentiments are echoed daily. Well, Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition we know that we have a long road ahead of us but we are ready for the ride. And as we are well aware, in Saskatchewan that ride is going to be bumpy.

Thank you.

(2130)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise here on behalf of my constituents to support the Speech from the Throne. I want to thank the mover and the seconder for the excellent job that they did, and I would also like to welcome the member from North Battleford. And I'm not going to pick on him because I think he's going to get enough of that in the coming session.

I've also heard tonight a lot of pessimism, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's time for a little more optimism in our speeches here — not contradicting them, just give them some real facts. As you're aware, Mr. Speaker, my constituency includes the city of Estevan — a city which is known as the energy capital of Saskatchewan due to the abundance of electricity, coal, and a large and vibrant oil industry, which has certainly helped in the economic turnaround of our province recently.

With record-breaking land sales and development of deep well drilling, I'm told this latest activity could be larger than the Leduc find in Alberta. Estevan also holds the title of sunshine capital of Canada. A title that a city you're familiar with, Mr. Speaker, once tried to steal from us, but in consultation with Environment Canada we clearly retained this title.

In my constituency we have people who think many hours of this sunlight is wasted in the wee hours of the morning, as we struggle with the expense of our recreation programs in the darkness of early evening. But that is an issue for a different time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of attending a function which is not quite a title for Estevan, but an achievement of some of my constituents. I was present to help send off some talented people from Estevan as they head to Alberta. And this is not a sad occasion, Mr. Speaker, for I am sure they will return victorious. I am also sure that all members of the legislature will want to join me in giving our best wishes to the Saskatchewan Pool Tankard winners from Estevan; the team of Jim Packet, Jeff Mosley, Dallas Duce, Ken Loeffler, and fifth man, Bob Doerr.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Another title that we are well on the way of achieving, Mr. Speaker, happened this past October when the residents of Estevan and the surrounding communities held their 20th anniversary of the Estevan United Way and television marathon -- a 36-hour event using local talent and hosts to raise money for the United Way. The interesting part of this is that for 19 of those 20 years, Mr. Speaker, they were the

first in Canada to reach their goal for the United Way goals, and I think they richly deserve our recognition.

The people of Estevan are not only generous, Mr. Speaker, but they are also optimistic. In a recent survey of the Estevan Chamber of Commerce, 97 per cent of the respondents are reasonably to very optimistic about the year to come. Only 3 per cent of survey respondents were uncertain as to their economic outlook for business in 1997, and no respondents expected the upcoming year to be poor.

Business volume is projected by respondents to increase by approximately 16 per cent in 1997. Volume increases are expected by 68 per cent of those replying, while an additional 32 per cent of respondents expect volumes for 1997 to remain about the same. Forty-three per cent of those same respondents expect to increase the size of their staff while 54 per cent intend to keep their staffing levels the same. Much of this optimism is a credit to the performance of our government over the past five years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — This is evident in a recent letter to the honourable Minister of Finance from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business from which I quote the following paragraph:

While we have a long way to go, it is important for the business community to recognize that many of the forward-thinking decisions that were announced in previous provincial budgets -- items like the reduction of the small business corporate tax rate; the elimination of sales taxes on direct agents and bad debts; the 9 per cent investment tax credit and lower corporate income taxes for manufacturers and processors — have been of great assistance to Saskatchewan firms. Most importantly, your government's attention to the deficit and debt has offered small firms one of the most important elements they need to create jobs -- stability.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ward: — Our economic plan is working, Mr. Speaker. Slowly and steadily our population grows along with our job rate while our unemployment rate remains one of the lowest in Canada. This, I believe, is the stability that small business is looking for and we will continue to provide into the new century. I believe this optimism proves that our economic plan for partnership and renewal is working.

In education, Mr. Speaker, we will strive to ensure that our children have the best quality public education possible, and that our education system is capable of training and retraining our workforce to keep up with the explosion of information technology. Locally we have taken some very sound initiatives. This includes the development of a joint-use program between Southeast Regional College and the Estevan Comprehensive School with funding being provided by the provincial government. This will improve the quality of education in both systems.

Another program being implemented by the comprehensive school is the integration of a SIAST course into the school curriculum. This was done with the cooperation of SIAST officials and the Estevan Comprehensive teaching staff . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and the Department of Education, as the minister has so fondly reminded me. I believe these programs are excellent examples of local boards, staff, and government working together to improve the quality of education in Saskatchewan.

Another priority that this government will embark on is to continue to protect medicare and to provide the best quality that the government can afford within the principles of medicare and in the face of federal cut-backs. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we provided 40 million back-filling for federal cut-backs last year, plus another 40 million for transitional funding, and we will have to back-fill again this year for more federal cuts to our health system.

But what bothers me is not that we have to protect the Saskatchewan people from federal downloading, but that in doing so we will be criticized by the opposition for doing it. It seems quite evident from their recent leadership convention, that they're trying to convey themselves as the guardians of the health system. They even went so far as to elect a doctor as their leader. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I think putting a doctor in charge of a health system is like letting a fox guard the chicken coop.

Another direction that this government will take is we will invest in a transportation strategy to improve the quality of our road system. Great strides have already been made in this area with the development of the south-west transportation study, an excellent example of communities, railways, Department of Highways, and local people working together. And we will again, Mr. Speaker, work on our roadways to protect our constituents from the mistakes of the federal government — who allowed, against our wishes, the demise of the Crow rate and the abandonment of rail lines — because we felt it would be detrimental to our road system. But did they listen? No. Did they initiate a national highway program? No. Did they care about our farmers getting their grain to port? No.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, we get the official opposition member from Saltcoats on the radio saying, we should have the Government of Saskatchewan put a two-year moratorium on rail line dismantling to give short-line operators the chance to evaluate the feasibility of operation.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think we might like to do that, but it should be noted to the member from Saltcoats that the rail line jurisdiction is the federal Liberals' responsibility.

Another issue . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Oh, touched a nerve. Touched a nerve. Another issue the Liberals have raised recently is the fuel tax on gasoline and the percentage that is returned back to highways. They quote the CAA (Canadian Automobile Association) as stating that in 1988, 96 per cent of the tax went back into highways, but in 1996 we only put in 34 per cent.

This is an interesting statistic, Mr. Speaker, but totally misleading in reality, unless the Liberals are advocating going back to deficit financing to the tune of 324 million like we had in 1988 under the Tory government. We have chosen not to go down that path. Instead we will maintain the fiscal integrity that creates the economic stability that comes by balancing our budgets. For it is this path which will give us the freedom to control our future, which can only be done with the continued support of all the people of Saskatchewan.

For it is only with their support that we can hand over the new century to our children, knowing that we did as much as possible to give them a fresh start.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Koenker: — There are many things I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, but I'd also like to say them tomorrow, and so I'd like to adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

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