

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

The Speaker: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to the rule 27, it is your duty at this time to elect a Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole. The procedure to be used in this election is the same as those used to elect a Speaker. I now ask the Clerk to initiate the proceeding.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Clerk: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my duty to inform you that only one candidate has declared his intention to stand for the election as Deputy Speaker. That member is the member for Regina Coronation Park, Mr. Kim Trew.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Pursuant to rule 27(4) and 26(3), it is my pleasure to announce that Mr. Kim Trew, the hon. member for Regina Coronation Park, is elected as Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole. Congratulations.

MOTIONS

Appointment of Deputy Chair of Committees

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, before orders of the day I would ask, by leave of the Assembly, to move the following motion, seconded by the member from Regina Elphinstone, the Deputy Premier:

By leave of the Assembly, that Mr. Peter Prebble, member for the constituency of Saskatoon Greystone, be appointed to preside as Deputy Chair of Committees of this Assembly.

Motion agreed to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Referral of Annual Reports to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before orders of the day, by leave, I would move several motions that are regular motions and I'd ask leave to do that.

The first being a motion moved and seconded by the Premier, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale:

That by leave of the Assembly, that the annual reports and financial statements of various Crown corporations, related agencies, as were tabled during the 23rd legislature and not reported upon by the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations during the legislature, be referred to the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Point of order.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the motion was to be made by leave so we need to vote on the determination of leave first before we vote on the motion.

The Speaker: — I thank the member from Cannington for bringing that to my attention and I would now ask the Assembly if leave is granted?

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Reports of the Provincial Auditor to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly I move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Northwest:

That the various reports of the Provincial Auditor, as tabled during the twenty-third legislature and not reported by the Standing Committee of Public Accounts and as tabled in the present session, be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I so move.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Public Accounts to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave, I move, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Idylwyld:

That the *Public Accounts* of the province of Saskatchewan as tabled during the twenty-third legislature and not reported upon by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, as submitted to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly pursuant to The Financial Administration Act, 1993, and as tabled in the present session be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I so move.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Communication

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Regina Victoria:

That, by leave of the Assembly, that the annual report of

the Saskatchewan Legislative Library be referred to the Standing Committee on Communications.

I so move.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

Referral of Retention and Disposal Schedules to the Standing Committee on Communication

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, by leave of the Assembly I move, seconded by the member from Moose Jaw North:

That the retention and disposal schedules approved under The Archives Act by the Public Documents Committee be referred as tabled to the Standing Committee on Communication.

I so move.

Leave granted.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Agriculture

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I ask for leave to move a motion to establish the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move and I would ask, seconded by the member for Canora-Pelly, the opposition Deputy Leader:

That notwithstanding an order of reference dated December 6, 1999 made pursuant to rule 94(1) of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*, members Boyd, Bjornerud, Harpauer, Harper, Lingenfelter, Melenchuk, Serby, Wartman, Weekes be appointed forthwith the Standing Committee on Agriculture; and that the said committee be severally empowered to examine and inquire into such matters and things as may be referred to it by this Assembly and to report from time to time their observations thereon with powers to send for persons, papers, records, and to examine witnesses under oath. And further at this present time that the committee do specifically receive and report on representations from interested parties and individuals with respect to the farm income crisis now facing western Canadian farmers; and to this purpose the said committee be authorized to conduct its proceedings in the Legislative Chamber except when the Assembly is sitting, and that the committee proceedings be televised by the Legislative Assembly on Saskatchewan's Legislative Network.

And further that the Legislative Assembly do also broadcast the audio of the proceedings on Internet via the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan web site.

I so move.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move the House now recess until 1:30 p.m. today.

The Assembly recessed until 1:30 p.m.

AFTERNOON SITTING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Introduction of Page

The Speaker: — Order. Before routine proceedings, my colleagues, I wonder if I might beg your indulgence in introducing an addition to one . . . to the staff of pages that are here to serve us. I would like to introduce Rebecca Fiissel.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today on a very eventful day in agriculture we are joined by a number of folks from the agriculture community too numerous to mention to you individually, but there are folks representing farm groups from all over the province. On behalf of the official opposition, I would like to welcome them to the Assembly here this afternoon and look forward to their presentations and remarks later in the day.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with my colleague and friend from Kindersley in welcoming at least some of the farm delegation who will be with us today, and later today; and also thank them, and I might add, other members of the legislature including our coalition members and members of the opposition who have been actually very helpful in putting forward a solid front in the approach to Ottawa.

So I just want to thank the individuals who are here today and I very, very much look forward to the comments and issues that you will raise here today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. MacKinnon: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to the Assembly through you two guests who are very special to me, my son, Alan MacKinnon and his girlfriend, Jen Holden. They're both university students and Alan is taking a lot of classes in agriculture and thought he would come to listen to the debates today.

So I ask you to welcome and I ask them to stand in the Speaker's gallery — Alan and Jen.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce you and through you to the Assembly, my husband, Larry Harpauer, and through the program of take a child to work for a day, my daughter, Shannon Harpauer, and an additional student, Tessa Williams.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to the Assembly, Mr. Allan Kerpan, our MP (Member of Parliament) from Blackstrap, and welcome him to our Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to other members of the Assembly, Joe McMaster, who I'll ask to stand. And Joe is originally from Plenty but he's moved into Saskatoon and is attending the University of Saskatchewan, studying political science.

So today will be hopefully a useful exercise. I think actually a very good day to come with what's going to happen here, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd like all members of the Assembly to welcome Joe to the Assembly today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Brkich: — I'd like to introduce a former sitting member of this Saskatchewan legislature, Mr. Gerald Muirhead, right there behind the bar.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you my father, someone who I've known all of my life, and I hope the relationship will continue for many years to come. And also to remind him that no heckling is permitted while I'm speaking later on. So I'd like the House to welcome him here today.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Crofford: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize in the gallery, Gord Gunoff and other members of IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) and John MacLeod, building trades, and welcome you here on an important day to listen to rural concerns in the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House, two farm families from my constituency, Mr. and Mrs. John Schreiner, and Mr. and Mrs. Dave Weins. Welcome to the legislature.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Family Farm Crisis

Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the official opposition to speak for the Saskatchewan farmers. My colleagues and I have received numerous letters from the farm families and I would like to share with the Assembly some of the sentiments that have been expressed to us. And I quote, Mr. Speaker:

Everything that my mom and dad ever made went back into their 12-quarter farm. They never splurged on anything and definitely don't have any luxuries. They never took my sister and I on a holiday because they couldn't afford it. I always thought my sister and I were deprived because we didn't have lots of clothes and we didn't have our own brand new vehicles when we turned 16. I have to sit back and watch everything that my dad achieved in his 37 years of farming go down the drain. Their retirement is going down the drain because everything always went back into the farm so they could keep up and make the payments. Years of hard work and tears are down the drain.

Even if my mom and dad survive another year on the farm, it won't be the same. The hurt of knowing this cannot even be said. It won't be passed down to any more family ever again. And that's not because I don't want to continue in my father's footsteps, it's because we can't make a living.

The government is slapping farmers in the face. Could I charge the government with abuse? They would slap me in the face and laugh at how pitiful I am, and continue on with turning Canada into their goal of becoming the next Third World country.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Gold Ribbon Campaign

Ms. Jones: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1905, the year we became a province, the Saskatchewan farm pioneer named Mabel Wilson Hawthorne wrote the following in her diary:

How did we overcome the insurmountable barriers in making a home which called forth every ounce of human strength we had to give? How did we do it? Baking, gardening, milking, pickling, and canning, doing our own sewing for our families didn't leave much time for dreaming. And yet the dreams were there. Engrossed in our homes, we accepted all that went with it, but always dreaming of better days to come.

Today, Mr. Speaker, nearly a century later, the Saskatchewan Women's Agricultural Network, SWAN, is launching a gold ribbon campaign asking each of us to wear a gold ribbon as a symbol of hope and in support of our farm families and rural communities.

A symbol of hope for farm families today who just like Mabel Hawthorne are looking forward to better days to come. The gold ribbon campaign is in recognition of the fact that farm families are under great stress.

Mr. Speaker, we are here today to listen, to give encouragement, and most importantly, to act in support of our farm families. I, and all members, wear the gold ribbon with pride and with conviction.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Crisis

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise today on behalf of the farmers and their families of Saskatchewan. And would like to share one of their stories, and I quote:

It is difficult to explain the toll and the effect that the farm crisis has had on my husband, myself, and my family. Who would have ever guessed that the year 1998 would be so disruptive for our family. As usual, the crop was put in this spring, despite the fact there was basically no moisture.

My husband had to have his gall bladder removed and so he had scheduled his surgery sandwiched between seeding and springtime. My husband has never been hospitalized before in his life. The stress mounted daily as he awaited his surgery and as he awaited the growth of the crop.

Now, Mr. Speaker, only a wife knows and understands the pride that men have that does not allow them to speak of their innermost concerns and fears. This is what the government does not see. It does not see farmers losing their pride and self-respect. It does not see the wives who try to improve their husband's frame of mind only to have their husband turn against them. And the government cannot see the innermost turmoil of a farmer. Nor does the government want to see the despair in the eyes of the farmer.

The beginning of 1999 of course brought no relief — take extensions on loans, buy a little at a time, hope for AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance). I don't think so; hope is long-gone, not even a subject to be brought up on the farm these days.

This is the real farm crisis — the loss of hope, continued discouragement and deep depression and a disregard for government figures who are clueless as to the plight of the farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Distress Letter

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In all the discussions on the current farm situation as we talk about subsidies and international markets and so on, it's quite easy to forget the human face behind the crisis. We are, after all, talking about human lives, human aspirations, human destinies.

We should not forget this simple fact, humbling fact. To help keep our focus where it belongs — on the people involved — I

want to read to you a portion of a letter received by Carol Skelton, and I quote:

When Mr. Vanclief said losing his farm was the best thing that happened to him because his number one goal in life was to become the Minister of Agriculture, it doesn't answer the question: what of the people whose number one goal in life is to become farmers? Apparently that doesn't count any more.

Those gifts from our fairy godmother only count when it happened to him. Our Christmas gift to each other this year, Mr. Speaker, is to pool the resources and try to make our truck payment.

A voice, Mr. Speaker, of many voices to keep in mind during our deliberations.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Crisis

Ms. Bakken: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to also rise and share the story of one Saskatchewan farm family with the Assembly, and I quote:

Our family is in a farm crisis. We are durum farmers in southwest Saskatchewan who farm two sections of land. My husband and I were both raised on farms and we chose to raise our family on the farm. We were not gifted with the family farm and realize only too well the stress of trying to make a farm work financially.

We have applied for AIDA but have heard nothing. If one listens to the rumour mill, I do not think we should expect any amount of support from them. We cashed in on all the RRSPs that we had to make last year's payments. What more are we expected to do? We do not want a hand-out. We want a fair value for the product we grow. We need the government to see our family as worthwhile contributors to our Canadian society.

I need the government to understand that I am working as hard as I can to support my family in our chosen lifestyle of farming. Times are very financially tough for us right now. The big banks do not care about us but our government should. We farmers are talking about survival; not acquiring the newest truck, not travelling to Hawaii for the winter, not building the biggest, newest home.

Please listen to us. Please understand our situation and help us through it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Daughter's Letter

Mr. Wartman: — Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues from the House in reading from a farm letter . . . (inaudible) . . . This one

is from a 17-year-old farm daughter who displays a calmness and a wisdom that many might envy.

She writes about who she calls the “average” farmer and what the reaction must have been when average farmers across the prairies flicked on their TVs to be told by the Prime Minister that they really have no problems. She writes: “Can you visualize the scene as the bomb was dropped?”

My name (she says) is Nicole Stenerson. I live on a farm. I never claim to be a farmer because I know I will never stay on the farm or take over the family farm. For now, I just live there. The average farmer I spoke of is my father. I can't imagine the frustration my father feels and the betrayal he felt at that moment when our Prime Minister said that we didn't need any help.

She closes by saying:

Although I empathize with my father, I will never totally understand the spirit that ties farmers to the land. It's a love you have to be born with. I don't believe it's a tie you can develop. Our federal government is breaking those ties, and watching the effects is heartbreaking.

And we can add, Mr. Speaker, listening to Nicole's letter is also heartbreaking.

Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Financial Support for Farmers

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Premier. Mr. Premier, later today this Assembly will hold a special emergency debate on the current farm crisis, an idea first proposed by the Saskatchewan Party just one week after the election. Of course you were too busy back then, buying off the Liberals, to pay much attention to the farm crisis.

Nevertheless the Saskatchewan Party is pleased that this debate is finally taking place, and we support the farm groups' call for a billion dollars of emergency assistance for our farm families.

However there is a lot more that your government should and could be doing. None of these were addressed in the Throne Speech, so we're asking you about them today.

Mr. Premier, your recent mid-term financial report showed a \$250 million windfall from increased oil revenues. What plans does your government have to provide immediate assistance to farm families?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear the Leader of the Opposition reiterate again his support in what has been a non-partisan, non-political, and really quite a remarkable show of unity by Saskatchewan farm people and Saskatchewan people generally on this crisis which takes place.

And today we'll hear from the various constituent elements and hope that this will add further weight to the arguments that we are advancing.

In the course of the session, and the course of the weeks ahead, the government will be announcing some specific matters as to what the Saskatchewan government can or cannot do. But I would remind the Leader of the Official Opposition — which I'm sure that he will accept — this problem really is a problem that can only be addressed at the national level given the fact that there are huge subsidies by the Americans and the Europeans. And the Saskatchewan government or Manitoba government or for that matter Alberta government, cannot do the solutions. The solutions have to be done federally, internationally, and we'll do our best as we can provincially as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, the Premier perhaps forgets that for eight years the NDP (New Democratic Party) turned its back on rural Saskatchewan. That's why on September 16, Saskatchewan turned its back on the NDP.

But we wonder, we wonder, Mr. Speaker, did the NDP get the message? Judging from yesterday's Speech from the Throne, the answer is no. The Throne Speech contained absolutely no direct help for Saskatchewan farm families.

Mr. Premier, today the Saskatchewan Party is releasing the results of a poll — and I know you have great respect for our polls — showing that 69 per cent of Saskatchewan . . . 69 per cent of Saskatchewan people think the province must also come up with new money to help farm families. That's people polled in both rural and urban Saskatchewan; people who recognize the impact that the crisis is having on all of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Premier, what further steps — beyond what we know and agree that the federal government has to do — what further steps does your government intend to take to address the farm crisis?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I don't think we need to have the benefit of the polls of the so-called Saskatchewan Party. Everybody knows, Mr. Speaker, that this is a very serious crisis and I don't think we need to have the numbers indicated by the Leader of the Opposition in this regard.

But I would draw the attention of the Leader of the Official Opposition to page five of the Speech from the Throne where amongst other matters the government outlined in broad general terms negotiating with the federal government to withdraw from AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance), something which the Leader of the Opposition supports; reduce high input costs facing farm businesses, presumably something the Leader of the Opposition supports; reduce the cost of crop insurance and enhance producer coverage, something which I'm assuming that the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party agrees, supports; farm input costs monitoring program; and I could go on.

It's stated in the Speech from the Throne — a very good Speech from the Throne — it is a brand new day and we intend to pursue these and other areas.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Now, Mr. Speaker, we're hearing very, very little new from the Premier. But one thing that he did say in his Speech from the Throne, he's talked about the government would be monitoring farm input costs. Now most farmers that I know — and I happen to be one myself — do a pretty good job of monitoring their own farm input costs. What they really need is someone to start lowering their input costs.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — They need somebody, Mr. Speaker, who will lower education tax, property tax, fuel tax, Saskatchewan Power bills, SaskEnergy bills. Your government directly controls these costs, and your government has raised these costs time and time again over the last eight years.

Mr. Premier, instead of monitoring input costs, when are you going to start lowering these input costs that you directly control? How much provincial funding are you going to dedicate to lower government controlled farm input costs?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the government of Saskatchewan has taken the view over the last eight years of our administration, and with the one sad period of expectation in the 1980s, throughout the history of the province of Saskatchewan, that our Crown corporations are owned by the people of Saskatchewan — farmers, business people, working men and women — and that the Crown corporations have an obligation to provide as efficiently and at as low cost as possible the services of those Crown corporations, and do so in accordance with commercial standards which were acceptable both at home and abroad.

I think by every measurement, every objective measurement, that goal has been obtained and achieved by the Crown corporations and we'll continue on that line. And unlike the Saskatchewan Party, we will not support the privatization and the sell-off of the Crowns to the large corporation friends that you have, and then just watch the prices go up for farmers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, the Saskatchewan Party does agree that the federal government has the major role to play in addressing the current farm crisis. However, your government also has a role to play. After all let's remember, the NDP government is equally responsible for creating this problem in the first place when you ripped up GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) back in 1992 and never replaced it with anything.

Mr. Premier, when are you going to take responsibility for your government's attack on farm families and when are we going to see a long-term safety net program for this province?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — You know, Mr. Speaker, I do really sincerely hope — and I still think that we can do this in a non-partisan and political way — but I do want to draw to the attention of the Leader of the so-called Saskatchewan Party what took place by way of a statement in *The Western Producer*. *The Western Producer* is dated November 16, 1995 and the headline which I have in front of me here says, in *The Western Producer*, "Reformer likes decentralization" by Elwin Hermanson. And it is stated as follows, is written by the Leader of the Opposition, quote:

Don Mazankowski's GRIP, guaranteed revenue insurance plan program, has been a disaster.

And then when the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party was a member of the House of Commons, this is what he had to say about the Crow rate, which added \$325 million every year extra burden to the farmers of Saskatchewan. He said this on March 30, 1995, page 11267, quote:

For years farmers have been saying they do not mind doing their share and losing the rail subsidy . . .

is the quotation referred to the Crow rate. That's your position.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — I sense that the Premier quit mid-sentence. And I would appreciate it if he would take quotes from the House of Commons in context. Nevertheless we'll debate that another day.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to look across the floor and see the new NDP-Liberal partnership. Now on one hand we have the party that ripped up GRIP, and it's joined at the hip by the party that invented AIDA. It's no wonder farm families aren't exactly jumping for joy.

Mr. Premier, Saskatchewan farm families need a billion dollars of cash assistance from Ottawa, but they also need a sustainable long-term safety net program so that we're not in the same jackpot again year after year after year. You've had several months, in fact you could even argue several years to work on a replacement for GRIP.

Mr. Premier, the Throne Speech says you are working on a safety net program. Will you table your proposal for a long-term safety net program today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me in this regard, at least I hope he does. I think that there are two main farm programs on the national level — I mean federal/provincial — which have some potential for being of assistance. Obviously one is (NISA) Net Income Stabilization Account and the other one is crop insurance which needs to be improved and enhanced. We've talked about . . .

At the same time, it's in the Speech from the Throne as the

Deputy Premier has pointed out for me as well. As well, the Minister of Agriculture has been in deliberation even before the provincial election with federal/provincial governments on the question of whether or not we can devise an acceptable third line of defence or a permanent farm safety program as you have indicated. I think that this is an idea which needs to be explored very much but we face the federal government whose view is that NISA and crop insurance should be the basic programs and may need to be enhanced and/or changed, that's good enough. In addition to that, we should look at your suggestions as well and we are going to do that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, when you are being pushed over a cliff, exploration isn't exactly necessary. What you need is a net under there to catch you and right now people are going over the cliff.

We've had a major farm crisis for over a year now and still, I understand, Mr. Premier, that there is no plan in place now. What are you waiting for?

Mr. Premier, having a plan or not having a plan is exactly how we wound up with AIDA. The NDP Minister of Agriculture wouldn't take part in the talks. He refused. He refused to go to the table; instead he stayed home. Of course this was such a brilliant idea that the people of Watrous decided he should stay home for good.

Mr. Premier, the federal government is talking about simply extending some version of AIDA. AIDA is a complete failure. When are you going to present a counter-proposal that works for Saskatchewan farmers?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the fact that we need to have not only immediate assistance — the 1.3 billion for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I think is accepted by everybody in this House — we also need concurrently additional programs which will be there forever, if I can put it that way, such as NISA, or crop insurance, or some form of a third line of defence program, those which are being worked on and there's no need about that either.

But I do remind the Leader of the Opposition that it was he who was arguing strenuously and regularly that we should rush into signing AIDA. I recall that very specifically. His argument was: don't delay, sign into AIDA because it was a great idea. And then when we signed into AIDA, after the farmers got them, hey it was the wrong thing to do; you shouldn't be signing into AIDA. This is an example of what happens when you are dominated totally by political consideration rather than consideration for the real hurt and pain of the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the Premier that it's been the Saskatchewan Party that's been the initiator of solutions to the problem. We've been waiting for a response from the government.

I'm just going to ask a very short and simple question: do you have the foggiest notion about what to do about our safety net situation? Do you have the foggiest idea what to put in place to replace GRIP? Do you have anything at all, anything, the slightest sliver of hope, in the form of a program that you can table in the legislature today?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1400)

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, not only does the government have, as it has stated in the Speech from the Throne yesterday, a rather detailed Speech from the Throne, what we can do provincially and what we have to do on a federal-provincial basis . . . on a federal-provincial basis. That has been set out.

And I'll go one step further to the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party, we actually have in mind those things that we do not want to do. And what we do not want to do and what we never wanted to do was to eliminate the Crow rate subsidy, which is what that leader argued for in the House of Commons and to which he added \$350 million a year to the farmers of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Farm Aid Programs

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Agriculture, a member of the so-called NDP-Liberal coalition which looks pretty NDP to me over there.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister, last week you represented the Government of Saskatchewan at the WTO (World Trade Organization) talks in Seattle. Unfortunately, judging from the television reports, Seattle didn't amount to much more than smoke and mirrors, which you would know all about. But before . . . But we must understand that while your sidekick from North Battleford was out in search of the perfect Starbucks coffee, you and Vanclief, I understand, had a little talk about agriculture policy.

So, Mr. Minister, Saskatchewan farmers are wondering how your chat with the federal Agriculture minister went? Can you assure the farm leaders in our gallery today, and the farm people of Saskatchewan today, that you have a commitment from Lyle Vanclief that all of the 1998 AIDA money still outstanding will be paid to Saskatchewan farm families before Christmas as he committed?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it's a great pleasure to stand in this House again as part of a coalition government that may look, may look quite NDP, but I want to say the members opposite look pretty Conservative to me as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — They look like a lot of Conservatives to me. Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the members opposite and to the member from Kindersley that the, the issue here, Mr. Speaker, is not one I think of whether . . . the Leader of the Opposition, when he was in the House of Commons, said for years farmers have been saying they do not mind doing their fair share and losing the Crow subsidy, he was talking about. I don't know which farmers you were talking to, which farmers you were talking to, but it certainly wasn't the farmers of Saskatchewan.

They wanted the subsidies in place on transportation, and you were a big part of getting rid of them. What the farmers should expect from you is an apology for getting rid of the agricultural subsidies that we're now trying to fight to get back for the farmers in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Minister, the AIDA program is a failure, and if you care to talk with your coalition partner, the NDP member over here, we'll have an idea that people all over Saskatchewan agree with that. Even Vanclief, Lyle Vanclief, says the AIDA program is a nightmare. John Harvard, the federal Liberal Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture says AIDA is an absolute failure.

Another Ontario Liberal MP says he's ashamed of the Liberal AIDA program. But even you now have admitted that the AIDA program is a bust.

But before we can move to a new program for 1999, farmers need to be paid out for 1998. The latest information out of the AIDA office in Ottawa indicates that almost 5,000 farmers still have not had their AIDA applications approved or looked at, processed for 1998.

Mr. Minister, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, what specific measures has your government taken to ensure the farm families of Saskatchewan will have an AIDA cheque in the mail to them before Christmas?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say to that member in particular because I think he's a little confused when he speaks about AIDA. Anyone who will remember being in this House earlier this year will remember when the then minister of Agriculture was reviewing the terms of AIDA carefully, that member said, sign up and sign now. He pushed hard — yes he did — he pushed hard and the Leader of the Opposition said, get on with it, sign up to AIDA right away. That's what they said. Well the member shakes his head but he's not telling the truth when he shakes his head because he pushed, he pushed the government to sign AIDA quickly. And then when it didn't work . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would ask all members please to co-operate and choose your words judiciously.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I'll say when the Leader of the Opposition inadvertently misled the people to believe that they should sign up, they should sign up, he was

doing a disservice — a disservice to the farmers of Saskatchewan. And then when it doesn't work, what does he say? You shouldn't have signed up. Get out of it as quick as you can. Now which of those two policies is the Conservative Sask Party policy?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture inadvertently says to the people of Saskatchewan they had no role in the AIDA program when indeed Upshall was down there negotiating, trying to put the program together for the farmers of Saskatchewan. And what did we get? Now we got the disaster that we have called AIDA. And even you have admitted it is a disaster in Saskatchewan today.

Mr. Minister, let's move on to the federal government's commitment for another \$170 million in the AIDA program to address negative margins for 1998. Why has not a single farmer in Saskatchewan had a negative margin application processed? It's a question that we have been asked many times on this side of the House and it's a question we have asked the AIDA officials in Ottawa. And they tell us it's because you in the province of Saskatchewan have not signed off on the '98 program for AIDA and that's why no negative margin applications have been processed.

Is that true, Mr. Minister? Are the negative margin applications being held up because your government has not signed off on the '98 program?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I've had a hard time following the member. First of all, they pushed us to get into AIDA. The Leader of the Opposition pushed hard. Then he pushes us to get out. Now I think the member from Kindersley's saying, be in it a little bit.

Which of those three policies then is the one we should follow? Is it that we should be in, as your leader said earlier in the year? Is it that we should get out? Or are you now saying we should stay in a little bit?

But I want to quote from the *World Spectator* Moosomin, Monday, March 23, 1998, when the Leader of the Opposition party said, it says: "Elwin Hermanson said: 'I don't believe in making special deals for farmers,'" continuing his policy of getting rid of subsidies to farmers.

The reason we're in this position is because you, sir, and your colleagues in the Reform Party supported the Liberal government in getting rid of farm policy and subsidies, the Crow rate. You know that. And you deserve to apologize to the farmers in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — . . . a few weeks ago the government opposition farm leaders agreed the province should pull out of the 1999 funding for the AIDA program and use it to top up NISA accounts. Would you share with the Assembly this afternoon the progress you have made in negotiating the NISA top-up

with the federal government, and how soon the farmers of Saskatchewan can expect to access those funds in their NISA accounts?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I want to report to the members of the Assembly that we have had discussions with the federal government. We haven't got an official opinion but it's our understanding that they will allow the provincial portion of the 1999 AIDA, that approximately 100, \$107 million, to come out to be used as a top-up to NISA. And as the Leader of the Opposition in the interviews that were done after the last coalition meeting explained, he indicated it would probably take till early February to get the payments made, and that's probably not far off.

But I just want to say when it comes to support for farmers in this province, you and I and all taxpayers should know that they do support farmers as compared . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes, as compared to any other province.

Well you may not believe that the taxpayers in this province support farmers, but compared to Alberta we pay per capita double what taxpayers in Alberta pay towards supporting our farm families.

This is an issue that needs to go to Ottawa and the members opposite know that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Financial Support for Farmers

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's leave the polygraphic statements behind and let's get back to the truth. I want to ask a question of the Premier.

Mr. Premier, the Saskatchewan Party fully supports the call for \$1 billion of assistance from Ottawa. However we have just outlined all of the things that your government could be doing: developing a long-term safety net, lowering property taxes, lowering fuel taxes, lowering utility rates. We could mention that you could do something about saving short-line railways, you could do more about fixing provincial roads and highways. These are things that you should be doing to help struggling farm families.

When are you going to start to address these issues? When are you going to get the message that the voters sent you on September 16?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I think that I've already indicated to the Leader of the Opposition the outline in the Speech from the Throne which . . . well again, Mr. Speaker, it's a bit confusing. Yesterday they said this Speech from the Throne contained everything that they wanted and . . . (inaudible) . . . but today they say, oh no it's not our Speech from the Throne and it contains nothing whatsoever.

Now we are looking at every option that we can to provide

provincial assistance but I repeat again — and if the Leader of the Opposition is sincere and I believe he is sincere — that this is a national/international situation. The solution has to be found at Ottawa, and it has to be found on the basis of a unified voice for all the farmers and farm families and communities of this province.

That means politically, and I want to thank and congratulate the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party, for being a part of . . . together with the farm organizations, being a part of this process. That is where the solution lies. The solution does not lie when individual's items — as important as they may be — the solution will never be found there. It will only be found when this House and this province continues to speak loudly with a unified voice for the family farms of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

World Trade Talks in Seattle

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a ministerial statement on the world trade talks in Seattle last week. As we all know the permanent solution to the farm crisis is an end to international export subsidies. An end to export subsidies would allow our Saskatchewan producers to compete on a level playing field.

We know that our producers are as productive and as efficient as any in the world and given an open and fair market, they can compete with producers from any country in the world.

With that in mind, the Saskatchewan delegation, including the Deputy Premier, went to Seattle last week in the hope that the new round of talks would put the issue of export subsidies clearly on the agenda. Notwithstanding the demonstrations and tear gas, we were encouraged in the first days of the conference. Caucus meetings of the Canadian delegation went well. Drafts of an agricultural communiqué which we were shown made reference to the need for early substantial reductions in export subsidies and eventual complete elimination.

We knew from the outset that the European Union was unenthusiastic, but we were led to believe that in the face of a common front by Canada, the U.S. and members of the Cairns group, the European Union would reluctantly agree. The Governor of Idaho pointed out that without trade with his state, every Idahoan would be required to eat 67 potatoes per day. I pointed out then that in Saskatchewan if we were not trading, every resident of this province would have to eat 58 loaves of bread per day washed down with 60 bottles of beer and an unidentified quantity of canola oil.

As hon. members know, in the end the meetings ended with no final agreement. Indeed, there was a conclusion that there would be a cooling-off period and no new meetings for at least three months.

The reasons for the failure of the trade talks are not easy to summarize. But certainly the clearest issue was the European Union is still determined to encourage food production as a

matter, they say, of public policy and culture which they call multi-functionalism. Also, as our trade ambassador Sergio Marchi pointed out, the agenda was too broad and the time was very short and made shorter by virtue of the fact the talks could not commence the first day.

(1415)

The collapse of the trade talks does not mean that negotiations for freer trade are off but they are certainly delayed. The fact that there will be no early reduction in international export subsidies underlines the importance of our developing a made-in-Canada solution to deal with the present farm crisis. We need to see what we can do here at home.

The possibility that the US (United States) will now maintain and possibly even increase subsidy levels to compete with the Europeans, also puts further pressure on our producers and on our governments. All of this underscores the importance of the emergency debate to occur in this House today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, to respond to the ministerial statement.

Leave granted.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's no question that the farmers of Saskatchewan can compete with the farmers all over the world if we're competing on a level playing field. As the people in Saskatchewan know, and indeed it's a Saskatchewan crisis not just a farm crisis, they also understand that we are not on that level playing field.

And that's what we're trying to address and that's what the WTO talks were all about. And they were extremely important talks. And it was disappointing to see that people wanted to try and disrupt those talks in Seattle rather than trying to level the playing field in trade negotiations in a number of areas, including the extremely important area of safety nets and long-term safety nets, and solutions for agriculture, and subsidy levels of various countries.

And while the minister was out looking for a cup of coffee for the Minister of Agriculture, at least the Minister of Agriculture was trying to do something productive and had opportunity to speak with the federal Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Vanclief. And we were pleased to hear that he made some progress, or at least that's what the impression left by the news reports were — that progress was perhaps made. And we'll be looking forward to the minister's comments later today with regard to the type of progress that he made, because we simply can't compete.

It's not a case of how many farmers we are going to lose, it's how soon we're going to lose them all in Saskatchewan under the current situation that we are faced with. We need to move quickly to address this situation, no question about it. And there are things that the federal government obviously has to take responsibility for, in terms of trade negotiations, in terms of levelling the playing field.

But we also must recognize in Saskatchewan, and the government must recognize here in this province, that you indeed have a role to play. GRIP was there; GRIP is gone. GRIP wasn't perfect, yes, and everybody says that GRIP wasn't perfect, but I submit to you, Mr. Minister of Agriculture, that there are many farmers today who would be saying, I'd just as soon have it back today rather than be faced with the conditions we are faced with now.

So before you start pointing your finger over here, start looking at your own programs and the development of your own programs and what we can expect from you, more than the types of platitudes that we got in the Throne Speech, saying we will pursue a long-term safety-net program and the Premier gets up and says, that's our plan — we are going to pursue a long-term safety net program. Well you've been pursuing it since 1992 and we still have nothing.

So the debate that ensues — will ensue — this afternoon is extremely important and we will be looking forward to the comments and submissions of the agricultural community, the representatives of agriculture community, and look forward to the discussion from the minister at the conclusion of those remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You cannot say indirectly in this Assembly, by tradition, what you cannot say directly.

I would ask that you review the tapes of question period dealing with the Deputy Premier's response to the Leader of the Official Opposition and his comments dealing with the lack of truthfulness.

The Speaker: — I recognize the point of order raised by the hon. member from Cannington and I will review the tapes and bring back a response to your point of order.

Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SPECIAL ORDER

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, as I rise before this hallowed Assembly to give my very first speech as an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) from Moose Jaw Wakamow, I can't begin to tell you how nervous I am. But also how honoured I am that the Premier has chosen me to deliver the motion of acceptance of His Honour's excellent speech which we were privileged to hear here yesterday.

I am comforted though by the feeling that you, Mr. Speaker, must be almost as nervous as I. We are both new and, for the moment, in unfamiliar jobs. But we are both determined to do the best we

can for the people who elected us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — It seems appropriate therefore, that my first words be to you, Mr. Speaker, the newest Speaker to guide us through this parliamentary maze.

Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber you follow a line of distinguished Speakers, most recently my colleague from Moose Jaw North. And we are all confident that soon you will put your own signature on this position that quite literally links us to parliaments around the world and through the ages.

Congratulations and good luck, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Next I'd like to congratulate all members, new and returning, on their election this past September. I look forward to working with you all and to having what I'm sure will be some very lively discussions as we go about the people's business. We have different backgrounds, varying ideologies, contrary ideas on significant issues, but I am confident that each of us has at heart the best interest of the people we serve.

As a new member, I have much to learn. But this debate is a very good beginning.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the people of Moose Jaw Wakamow for choosing me as their MLA. The people of Moose Jaw are particular in their choices, choices they exercise with diligence and thought. I want to assure them that I will represent them to the very best of my ability.

I realize that there is a great responsibility that comes with elected office and I appreciate in more ways than one that I have been given a very rare opportunity. With this in mind, I pray that together we can serve the people and leave the world, at least our little corner of it, a better place than we found it.

I am very proud to stand before you representing the historic constituency of Moose Jaw Wakamow, named for the beautiful Wakamow Valley, one of the most important archaeological sites in the area, if not the province.

The original inhabitants to the area knew the valley as a home and a resting place. It is a beautiful, peaceful place — a sanctuary. It is definitely an historic tradition, a bridge to the past we Moose Javians are very proud of.

The Wakamow Valley is home to various flora and fauna, and in this year of the older person, elders both of aboriginal and non-aboriginal descent would appreciate that the Wakamow Valley has become home to a new monument dedicated to this the year of the older person.

The monument is new but is crafted from natural local material including two old cottonwood trees which had to be cut down in order to build the River Park bridge. It is also very appropriate that this monument should be adjacent to a children's playground showing the bridge that exists between the

generations.

Moose Jaw has significant historical value and tradition, but we are a progressive city — a city on the move. Moose Jaw is the newest tourist mecca of the Prairies.

Moose Javians can proudly boast that their city possesses a world-class spa, an historic downtown core including our infamous tunnels, the biggest craft store in the province, and our fabulous murals which can now be toured by trolley car. And I'm told that the trolley car is my predecessor's favourite new attraction in the friendly city.

Just recently the minister of Liquor and Gaming cut the ribbon for Moose Jaw's new liquor store in the recently refurbished CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) station. Our new station liquor store is a wonderful addition to our historic downtown, and according to my assistant, Bob, is equal to any in the province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly acknowledge a number of my predecessors — previous Moose Jaw MLAs who have influenced and inspired me. More will soon be said here about William G. Davies, who passed away recently. Bill Davies served the people of Moose Jaw and Saskatchewan from 1956 to 1971. He is most vividly remembered as the minister of Health during the medicare struggle of 1962. We should treasure his accomplishments and those of his colleagues in the Woodrow Lloyd government of the day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — I must also, Mr. Speaker, acknowledge Gordon Snyder who served as the minister of Labour while representing Moose Jaw and who was very instrumental in the introducing of the first occupational health and safety Act in North America; also John Skoberg who ably represented the people of Moose Jaw for years. All of these men shared a desire to help ordinary working men and women enjoy better lives.

All three were active trade unionists all of their lives. I am proud to say that I share their vision and their desire to help working people. I am very proud to be a trade unionist, and a proud member of the United Food and Commercial Workers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — I also want to say how proud I am to be following in the footsteps of the Hon. Lorne Calvert. I worked for him; I voted for him; I learned from him. And when I grow up I would like to be just like him.

Mr. Speaker, as I direct my remarks to the Throne Speech, I would like to imitate Rev. Calvert and quote from his book. In the book of Psalms, no. 37 we're instructed to, "turn from evil and do good, for the Lord loves justice." We are told to do good — right action, not just right thinking.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of this government and of the New Democratic Party because I believe we have done good work for the people of Saskatchewan.

From 1944 till 1999, the list of positive accomplishments is worthy of praise by any standard anyone can use. From

hospitalization to the child action plan, from public insurance to public accountability, the list of accomplishments of the CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party) governments in the last half of this century has been remarkable.

As we turn the corner on the ages, we can feel confident entering the new one because we have done not a bad job of ringing out the old.

I am happy to join this government at the beginning of its third term because I'm confident we will continue to work towards justice for all Saskatchewan people. The Throne Speech outlines some of the steps we will take to improve the lives of families, of students, of rural residents, and of seniors. It is a solid blueprint — workable, practical and imaginative.

I'm pleased to be part of this coalition government because, as His Honour said, we are on a new voyage of discovery which will take us into a new century, but more importantly, into a new way of doing things in the spirit of co-operation and openness.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1430)

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, let's be frank. At the beginning of this new voyage, you and I and the parties we represent have differences. We have a lot of good, tough political rhetoric to put aside. We have some mutual suspicions to overcome. But the people have told us that the old style of politics is for the old times. They want something new. They want us to co-operate.

So as I said, I pledge to do my part to make this coalition not just work but work well. This coalition government will do good things.

As something of an aside, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I am glad to see a coalition of progressive thought of centre-to-left parties. We have heard a great deal in this country lately about potential right-wing coalitions. We hear Reformers and Tories talking about a united alternative. We see Saskatchewan Reform MPs with the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, if the proponents of 19th century thought are trying to get together, it is logical that those of us looking ahead should join forces as we are doing.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, there is room at our table for all forward-thinking people. As a New Democratic Party government, we have done good things. As a coalition government, we are poised to do even better.

Mr. Speaker, because of the special circumstances of this session, I will limit my discussion of the Throne Speech to just a few initiatives. I want first to talk about health care.

Every day the Saskatchewan health system serves more than 35,000 of our residents. Every day 15,000 residents see a family doctor. Every day 4,300 individuals receive emergency or

scheduled hospital care, 200 use emergency road ambulance, 6,200 residents benefit from home care; nursing homes care daily for 9,200 residents.

The volume of high-demand surgeries has increased dramatically since 1991. Around 1,900 hip and knee surgeries are performed every year. Over 10,500 cataract operations are performed; angioplasties are over 900 a year.

I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but my point is obvious. The health system is serving the people it is designed to minister to and it is providing that service better and more efficiently. But a successful operation is not news. The timely setting of a child's broken arm in the emergency ward is of no interest to anyone but the child and parents.

No, we want to hear about health crisis. We want the story about someone who had their surgery rescheduled, maybe even twice. Frustration makes news, Mr. Speaker, not the everyday, ordinary successes of our health care system.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Our health system is designed and operated by humans. Humans, by definition, make mistakes. Any system we create is going to have its growing pains and we all know that.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, our health system devours a huge amount of money. The system could take even more than \$1.9 billion invested in health this year. Money is finite; our capacity to spend is limitless. Health care is in constant need of upgrading and our health system is always in need of improvement. Our resources in material and personnel will always need to be expanded. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. Medicare in Saskatchewan is under great stress today as yesterday.

This Throne Speech announced some important measures to remove some of that stress, and as an MLA in Moose Jaw, I am pleased with the measures to strengthen regional hospitals and I'm gratified that more measures will be taken to ensure that the bulk of health dollars goes into front-line services and less to administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, no one should be completely happy with a health system that lets even one person be denied essential treatment for too long. No one should rest easy as long as our health care workers are run off their feet. Anything less than perfection is unacceptable. We are constantly catching up and never quite making it. That's a reality of ever changing health care in today's world.

I hear in the Throne Speech a promise to make our health system even better. That promise gives me a great deal of pleasure.

Mr. Speaker, next I'd like to say a few brief words about taxes, and I'm sure there are other members in the House that will have their own comments. It's a great puzzlement to me that members of the opposition party talk about tax cuts as if they invented the concept. Someone showed me a recent column by

the member from Moosomin in which he said, "The government is still not willing to put forward a plan for tax relief in this province."

As I say, Mr. Speaker, that puzzles me. This year we reduced the sales tax and the personal income tax. The year before that we introduced tax credits for research and development, petroleum research, and film employment. The year before that, a 2 per cent reduction in sales tax and a cut in personal income tax. Also in the March 1999 budget we announced a personal income tax review committee, which has just released its report.

As His Honour said, we will study the report and present a tax reform plan in our next budget. They say, where is your plan? I say, where have you been?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, for the most part, mine is an urban constituency. But as in any Saskatchewan city that simply means the houses of those connected to agriculture are closer together than in the country. There are a number of farmers and retired farming families living in Wakamow, as well as many who are the children or grandchildren of farmers. Not many of us, Mr. Speaker, are more than a generation or two removed from the land.

As a Saskatchewan writer, E.A. McCourt once said, no matter in what part of the world you meet him and no matter how long he has been gone, the first question a Saskatchewan native will ask is how are the crops?

On this special day in the legislature, devoted to the agriculture crisis, I must acknowledge this fact. Moose Jaw is a railway town historically, but it is also a farm service centre providing goods and services to area farmers. These service centres in turn provide jobs in Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, when our rural economy is in crisis we all feel the effects. I am pleased that this Throne Speech addresses this crisis and draws our attention to the need for a very focused action. There is much to discuss in the first Throne Speech of this last legislature of this century, much to debate, and much to praise.

I am pleased with the announcement about stay-at-home caregivers, and I'm happy that steps will be taken to make post-secondary education more accessible for all families.

As a person with a union background I am happy that The Labour Standards Act will be reviewed and updated. So many initiatives, so little time. As I said, I am interested to hear what all members have to say about this new voyage of discovery.

Mr. Speaker, in my first moments in this legislature, I like what I have heard. I like the fact that the new government is not afraid of challenges, and I am pleased that it has the imagination to bring new approaches to old problems which still plague us. I am proud to join a party of honourable men and women who believe that there isn't a higher duty than doing good because they too love justice.

Mr. Speaker, this Throne Speech announced an historic new

beginning, the beginning of a real voyage of discovery. Because I agree with the message of the speech and because I am an eager passenger on this voyage of discovery, I am delighted to move, seconded by the member from Saskatoon Sutherland:

That a humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To His Honour the Honourable John L. Wiebe, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Saskatchewan.

May it please Your Honour:

We, Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Saskatchewan in session assembled, humbly thank Your Honour for the gracious speech which Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of this present session.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also an honour for me too to rise today to second the motion placed before this House by the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. And I thank the Premier for this honour.

It is a little humbling to rise for the second time in this House to take such part in such an important procedure. As a child of Saskatchewan, I've often thought about this place — about the incredible discussions that have taken place in this very room and the many great accomplishments and achievements that have come out of those discussions.

As a child of Saskatchewan of course, I can imagine the late Tommy Douglas rising in this House to either censure someone with his sharp wit, or inspire them with his golden tongue. I can imagine this room echoing both with the high moments and the low of the great medicare debate when Woodrow Lloyd displayed the level of political courage and determination that should stand as an example to all of us.

And I can easily imagine the great leaders of Saskatchewan, on both sides of the House, coming together in this room to help this province meet the challenges it has faced throughout our history.

So in rising to enter this debate today, I do so with a great sense of awe and a great deal of respect and admiration for all those who've gone before and all those that are here with us today. And that's why it's a touch ironic, but fitting nonetheless, that the first speeches of the first session of the last Saskatchewan legislature of the 20th century are being given by rookie MLAs. Appropriate because this is a province that is proud of its past, but one which recognizes the importance of the new, looking forward to the future.

I'd like to congratulate my colleague, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, for her fine speech and for setting a course of reason and compassion for the discussion that will inevitably follow.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to congratulate you upon your elevation to the Speaker's chair. Yours may be one of the toughest jobs in this Chamber, but I know that beginning today, you're held in high regard by all members of this House and that we will come to rely heavily upon your reason, your wisdom, and your patience in the very months ahead.

And I think it's entirely appropriate for me at this time to thank the people of Saskatoon Sutherland for the trust that they've placed in me and the honour they've bestowed upon me.

They're good people, Mr. Speaker. My constituency is home of the very mix of Saskatchewan people who make serving this province a pleasure — working people, the university community, families, young professionals, and retired people. People who have built this province and made our communities wonderful places in which to live, and people with hopes and aspirations for their futures. People who want us to do a good job in this House because they want to build a strong future here in Saskatchewan.

It's a privilege to be chosen by those people to serve them, Mr. Speaker. I hope to live up to that honour. I also hope to live up to the excellent record and service and compassion and intelligence of the previous member for Saskatoon Sutherland — The Reverend Mark Koenker.

Mark believed very strongly that social action and work in the community are a natural extension of his strong, spiritual beliefs. I hope in the years ahead that I too can demonstrate the same commitment that Mark demonstrated for 13 years in Saskatoon Sutherland and in this House.

Mr. Speaker, as the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow has said:

There's much in this Throne Speech to discuss, but what I like the most about this speech is it is so clearly based on the traditions and values of the people of this province. It is a Throne Speech which reflects Saskatchewan, our history and our future.

You know, it's said that a person learns their values at the knees of their parents. And I hope that it is the same case with me because I'm certainly proud to share the same values and commitment to action as my parents, Angus and Glenna Addley.

But I think that as a province we too collectively learn our values from those who have gone before us, those who've laid the foundation on which we now stand.

Mr. Speaker, our provincial motto is "from many peoples, strength" and I believe that the sentiment that is captured in that motto has inspired the greatest achievements of our province.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said: "Genius is the ability to put into effect what is in one's mind."

Some examples of Saskatchewan genius include — "from many peoples, strength" came the co-operation and credit union

movements which provided opportunities for our early farmers, our merchants, and consumers that were denied to them by larger institutions based beyond our borders.

(1445)

"From many peoples, strength" came the will to create medicare — a gift Saskatchewan gave to this country; one which we must constantly nurture.

"From many peoples, strength" came the industry, the learning, the culture, the commerce, and the sense of community which makes life in this province so complete and the envy of so many around the world.

Yes, Saskatchewan has been fortunate enough to have seen many remarkable individuals in public and private life who've inspired us to achieve, but it is "from many peoples, strength" that we have built the foundation upon which we are able to stand today. What a tremendous and appropriate motto for this province — "from many peoples, strength."

Mr. Speaker, what pleases me most about this Throne Speech we heard His Honour deliver yesterday is that so much of the spirit of that motto, provincial motto, is in it. It recognizes that there are some unique challenges ahead — it seems that people in Saskatchewan are always facing unique challenges — but it also discusses the way that we can work together to meet those challenges.

This is the same approach that has been taken by the government, led by our current Premier, over the past eight years. And it explains why we've been able to succeed in dealing with quite . . . some quite formidable challenges.

This Throne Speech is an expression of our collective minds, and let's continue to demonstrate in the time ahead the Saskatchewan genius to put into effect, as Fitzgerald said: "the vision that is in our minds."

I'm sure I don't need to remind members of the House the state of the province's finances just eight years ago, and I don't intend to belabour the point except to say that it was through sound leadership and commitment and strength of each person in this province that we were able to overcome that crisis and make a renewal of this province possible.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — And, Mr. Speaker, we're at that point. Because of strong leadership and a population with a strong commitment to this province, we've been able to restore our province, diversify our economy, and lay a broader, healthier foundation on which to build our future and create new opportunities. We've lived up to this province's motto: "from many peoples, strength." And as a result our province is now stronger in so many ways.

The recent mid-year financial report released by the Minister of Finance spells out in black and white just what we've accomplished. Retail sales are up 2.2 per cent August over August. Gas and oil drilling are both up substantially over the previous year. Housing starts are up by 9.4 per cent. Provincial

revenues are up because of higher activity, not because of higher taxes.

Fifty-four hundred more people were working in Saskatchewan this October than a year ago, with full employment increasing by 9,700. And Saskatchewan enjoys the second lowest jobless rate — unemployment rate — in Canada. These are good numbers; indicative of a province that has certainly harnessed many peoples' strengths.

But while we take satisfaction from these numbers, we cannot forget that our agricultural community, our farmers, and those who provide the services they need, are facing the most serious crisis in 60 years. So while we can take some satisfaction in our accomplishments, we must be mindful that we face another grave challenge, and that is the challenge posed by an international trade subsidy war that is being fought by the Europeans and the Americans, but which is claiming Canadian farmers as its first victims.

We are here to address that crisis and I'm sure every member of this House from city or country will want to use our time here constructively, to find solutions rather than to strike political poses. It's in the greatest . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — It's in the greatest of this province's traditions that we come together and help out those who need it and I'm certain that this House will rise to the occasion and work together to that end and we will live up to the spirit of this province's motto.

Yesterday, His Honour talked about some of the ways we will continue to revitalize and strengthen Saskatchewan's economy for the future. One way is tax reduction, something that this government has been doing for several budgets as the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow said. But as the Throne Speech mentioned, there will be an income tax reduction plan in our budget later this spring. This will help us build a system that is fair, simple, and easy to understand, one that helps us stay competitive while maintaining a balanced budget.

Another measure that His Honour spoke of is the new Partnership for Prosperity which will bring all sectors of the economy together to build jobs and growth, building strength on strength.

And, Mr. Speaker, we will improve the economy by improving the educational possibilities of those who run it. We will act to make post-secondary education more accessible for all. It's a simple fact, Mr. Speaker, that in today's world, grade 12 is no longer an acceptable mid-end point for those who seek permanent well-paying jobs. Now and into the next century, it's the launching pad. We will make post-secondary education in the future as accessible as high school is today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Addley: — Three ways to build the economy, three ways to build a stronger, more secure future for this province. And also as mentioned in the Throne Speech yesterday, we will work with the First Nations and Metis people, so they too can

continue their renaissance and their determined progress towards full partnership in the economy and in this society.

And by taking these steps now to build the economy, we will provide the means to improve our health care system, to provide the cultural and recreational amenities that make our society desirable and to provide the hand-up for those individuals and families who are unable to provide for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, as this legislative session carries on, we may occasionally become partisan and display behaviour that is not in the noblest of parliamentary traditions, but we have begun this last session of the Saskatchewan legislature in this century with a Throne Speech that endeavours to bring out the best in us. A Throne Speech which asks us to look at the challenges that face this province today and the challenges that we will face in the future, and to deal with those challenges in a way that reflects those values that make this province distinct.

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour for me not just as a rookie MLA, but as a child of Saskatchewan to second the motion made by the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. It's an honour to rise in this House and to speak to a Throne Speech which so ably carries on the traditions of this Chamber and this province.

It is a Throne Speech with a vision, yet it is realistic. It has both feet on the ground but its eyes are on the province's vast horizons — "from many peoples, strength." A great province has been built "from many peoples strength," and "from many peoples, strength", we will build a strong future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I now move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm on my feet to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity which I hope and believe will be seconded by the official Leader of the Opposition under rule 46.

The Speaker: — Could the Hon. Premier just briefly touch on the contents of the motion?

MOTION UNDER RULE 46

Provincial Agriculture Crisis

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The emergency debate that I would be introducing is in regard to the agricultural crisis now facing our farm families and our province. I think that it's of urgent need that we discuss this issue and urge the federal government to provide an agricultural trade equalization payment of \$1 billion to our Saskatchewan farm families.

Mr. Speaker, the motion reads, and I will formally move it at the conclusion of my remarks, seconded by the leader of the opposition, as follows:

That this Assembly strongly urges the Government of

Canada to immediately provide an agricultural trade equalization payment of \$1 billion to Saskatchewan farm families to address the agricultural crisis now facing our farms, our rural communities, our urban communities, and our province.

The Speaker: — Hon. members, you've heard the request for leave to move a motion without notice under rule 46. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by first of all thanking all the members of the House — the Leader of the Official Opposition and his caucus and of course from the government side, the coalition government — for allowing under Rule 46 something which I think truly fits the meaning of Rule 46, and to continue the spirit of our spirited fight for justice for the Saskatchewan and western Canadian farmer.

I want to begin also by saying, Mr. Speaker, that for some of us, two years ago, we gathered in this House in December to debate a matter of what was of some importance to Canada, the Calgary Declaration. At that time, we also put aside our partisan differences and, personally speaking, I was very proud that we were able to speak with one single impassioned voice about something which is very important and passionate to all of us — Canada.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the days once again draw short, it's December 1999, and once again we prepare to dawn the mantle of winter in Saskatchewan. And, once again, we gather in this legislature to put aside our partisan differences and to speak again with an impassioned single voice for Canada.

I say, for Canada, Mr. Speaker, because this crisis in farm income is truly a national issue that affects all Canadians. The philosopher and religious scholar, Ernest Renan, once said the following, quote: "A nation is a body of people who have done great things together".

"A body of people who have done great things together". By that standard I would argue that Canada is a great nation. We have done great things together. We have fought in two world wars and other conflicts, and we are still peacekeepers today. We created medicare and pension plans and social security and individual liberties. And we established in the process by doing great things together a society that I argue still remains a model for the world by adhering to the defining Canadian principles of fairness and co-operation.

Now we are gathered here today to call upon our neighbours across this nation for fairness and co-operation. I know that it's convenient for some of our neighbours in other parts of our country to say that the farm income crisis is merely somehow a Saskatchewan issue or a Manitoba issue or a prairie issue affecting only the farmers who till the soil. Mr. Speaker, they are gravely and greatly mistaken. This crisis in agriculture does affect our farmers to be sure. Of course it does. But it also affects Canadians from Vancouver Island on our Pacific coast, to Bonavista in Newfoundland in the Atlantic, to our great Canadian Arctic.

It affects grain handlers in our Canadian ports. It affects traders and commodities merchants in our financial centres. It affects automakers and manufacturers in our industrial centres, and most importantly of all, every Canadian who buys a loaf of bread or a bottle of vegetable oil made from the high quality food that our farmers grow. A Canadian issue — not to mention the pain, the suffering, the struggle of our families here at home, Mr. Speaker — a Canadian issue.

And I might go one step further. It is a Canadian issue because the problem is directly attributable to the effects of international trade which by law, and by convention, and by moral responsibility — I'd even argue by economic duty — lies as the direct responsibility of the federal government.

As is well known, today Saskatchewan producers face an income shortfall of \$1 billion largely through no fault of their own. The governments of the European Union and the United States are giving their producers massive subsidies — again, as is well known — nearly 60 cents out of the dollar in Europe; nearly 40 cents in the United States of America. And in so doing, they have created massive distortions in the market price of grains and in the supply of grains.

Wheat farmers in the European Union receive about six times as much financial assistance—six times as much financial assistance — as Saskatchewan farmers. In America, the figure is about four times as much assistance — four times as our Canadian farmers.

In the result our family farms, our producers, quite naturally and understandably, are coping with returns on grain production at levels that we have not seen, they have not seen, since the 1930s, the dirty thirties, as they were rightly called.

Mr. Speaker, it's not that, as has been mentioned in question period, that our farmers here on the prairies are looking for a handout. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We are not seeking a handout. Yes, competition in the global economy has driven, has motivated, our farmers to become more efficient. And they've had to sharpen their pencils and to trim costs and upgrade their technology, and to diversify. And they have done so.

(1500)

In the end, they have been obliged and have succeeded to be the best in the world — the best in the world — at what they do. They have not been shrinking from that challenge; they have embraced that challenge and they have largely met it. I repeat: our farmers are the best, most productive farmers in the world. But yet they still face an uphill battle.

The artificially low prices created by unfair and trade-distorting subsidies mean that our farmers simply cannot win. No matter how hard they work, no matter how many costs they trim, no matter how good they really are, no matter how much they diversify, they cannot win. And that's not fair.

And as Canadians we wouldn't stand for it if it occurred in the auto industry, or paper or pulp, or steel, or any other fundamental basic industry. And what could be more important to the salvation and the maintenance of the nation than the

provision of food, efficiently priced, of top quality, and a country committed to the notion of food self-sufficiency?

Our federal government, I argue again, is responsible at the international level and at the national level, but speaking internationally for the moment, to work to change those rules in such a way that they help our farmers. And the rules are obviously slanted against them. To avoid that responsibility or to somehow neglect it is to put our farmers obviously at the mercy of the export policies of the Americans and the European Community.

It's time, bluntly stated, that Ottawa, and indeed all of our Canadian neighbours from Vancouver Island to Bonavista to the Arctic north, as I have said, learned of the suffering being caused our farmers by this inaction. That is why we are here to send that message and to speak with one loud, strong, clear voice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — The people of Saskatchewan gather here today with a message for Ottawa and for all Canadians.

I want to say this again. We are gathered here today in an — it isn't totally unprecedented but unprecedented in the agricultural area — we're gathered here to communicate a message to all Canadians.

I say to all Canadians, please, please listen, and please, please act and act now. This is not an attempt to seek a bailout or a handout or an "out" of any kind. We are simply asking for fairness and co-operation — the Canadian principles upon which our nation is built and upon which it has prospered, and the Canadian principles upon which this country will remain united and strong into the 21st century.

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of my remarks, I quoted Ernest Renan about his belief that a nation is a body of people who have done great things together. And I believe that it's true. And as I said I believe Canada meets that standard and exceeds that standard.

But I also believe in the corollary that was proposed many years later by the eminent Canadian political scientist Frank Underhill. Dr. Underhill wrote the following:

A nation is a body of people who have done great things together in the past and hope to do great things together in the future.

Mr. Speaker, a nation's greatness is never finally proved. It's tested everyday, every age, every era, every year, every decade. And it is by meeting these tests that a nation proves itself to the world and to its own citizens that it is exactly that — a nation, a body of people who do great things, always do great things.

This crisis of farm incomes is such a test of our nationhood. Mr. Speaker, it is a test of fairness. It is a test of co-operation. And that is the message that we want to send right across the nation, from to sea to sea to sea.

Before I take my seat I want to repeat again my compliments as

Premier to all members of the legislature, regardless of our political differences, for setting aside those differences and working together on this issue which goes beyond politics.

And I particularly want to thank the many citizens who have joined us here today and who will soon add their voices, in their own words, in their own language, in their own heartfelt feelings, to the strong, single voice with which we speak about that message of fairness — fairness and co-operation for Canadians and all Canadians.

The farm sector, Mr. Speaker, has a long history in this province, going back to our very early roots. The first settlers who chose this place as the place to make their home. It is in essence what defines us. We are proud of farmers; we support our farmers; we support our agricultural sector — I mean in the sense of all of us — we are proud that they have feed and are feeding not only our country, our nation. The bread doesn't grow in a supermarket in Toronto. That they feed our nation but they indeed feed a hungry world. They embody what has been called a way of life.

We're proud of the contributions made by them, just as we are proud of the contributions made to our country by the fishermen off the coasts; by the oil industry in Alberta; by the mighty industries of central Canada.

We're all into this together with only 31 million people or so as Canadians. Now is not the time for us to divide as a nation, but to be stronger and more unified than ever. We've been proud of them and we've been proud of their contribution to building this great country. And that is why we're asking those Canadians to be similarly proud of what farming has done for them and for Canada, and Canada's role in the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — So, Mr. Speaker, that's why we ask today, in this unprecedented event, that with one voice we say to the people of Canada and to our government in Ottawa, that there be recognition of the nature of this crisis; to acknowledge the injuries being suffered here; to act quickly with firmness and co-operation as good neighbours should, as proud neighbours should, in the greatest nation in the world in which to live.

And with those few brief introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, I now would like to move, seconded by my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member from Rosetown Biggar, by leave of the Assembly:

That this Assembly strongly urges the Government of Canada to immediately provide an agricultural trade equalization payment of \$1 billion to Saskatchewan farm families to address the agricultural crisis now facing our farms, our rural communities, our urban communities, and our province.

I so move.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my first opportunity to rise and speak officially in the Assembly. And so before entering into my remarks, I want to extend my personal congratulations to the Premier and his colleagues on their election. I want to also congratulate my colleagues. It's good to see a group of very talented, very eager, and very dedicated people in the official opposition that are also prepared to work for the betterment of Saskatchewan.

And perhaps it's fitting in this first full day of sitting in the legislature that we are actually both on the government side and the opposition side working together in harmony to try to improve the lot of the economy of this province and therefore the people of the province.

The subject matter for this first speech in the legislature is one that I've dealt with many times, but unfortunately the circumstances that cause us to focus on agriculture today are a long way from being positive.

I will not go on for too long, Mr. Speaker. Those of us in the Assembly get to speak a lot. But today is unusual. Today we get to hear directly from the people of Saskatchewan, and quite frankly I like that.

The reason the Saskatchewan Party proposed calling farmers and farm leaders to address the House directly over two months ago was to put a face to the many words that we as politicians have spoken during this crisis situation. So often the farm income crisis is just simply called the farm crisis. However, it is simply not just a farm crisis. It is a province-wide economic crisis that affects each and every person in the province whether they know it or not.

And while we certainly want the federal government to listen carefully to what's said here today, we also want to reach these people in our province and hopefully throughout our country who may no longer feel as closely connected to the farm as their parents and grandparents did. We want Canadians to know that this crisis is a personal tragedy for thousands of people in Saskatchewan and beyond. This is a really a people crisis that demands action.

Mr. Speaker, in the members' statements today, many letters were read by Saskatchewan farm people — mostly farm wives, grandmothers, mothers — who related personally the feelings of hurt and dismay that they are experiencing. And I would like to take a minute to read parts of two more letters to the Assembly.

The first letter is actually addressed to Mr. Vanclief but it is a public letter to the people of Saskatchewan. And it says:

I am a farm wife raising four sons aged 4 to 15. I work full-time. Due to low grain prices and excessive moisture, my husband was forced to work full-time in town. So that left our 4 sons on the farm for long hours. I did not realize how stressed my eldest son was until he expressed concerns, weeping to me one evening. He felt he had to (be the) head of the farm while his dad was away. He's 15. He should be a kid while he can.

I have stressed also to my sons that I would be proud to

have them farm but to get an additional trade. But if we don't get any additional help from the government there will be no farms for our kids to come back to.

The other day my youngest son asked why so many farm yards have 2 houses on them. I explained to him that there would be a mother and a father in one house and a son or daughter and grandchildren in the other. He innocently replied: "I will build my house next to you some day." It brought a lump to my throat when I thought this might never happen.

And a second letter, and this was actually written by a husband and a farmer rather than a farmwife, but it's also very touching. It says:

Farming in Saskatchewan has never been a cakewalk.

My forefathers came to this country shortly after the turn of the century with a sense of adventure, a need for opportunity, and a keen desire to succeed.

My ancestors no doubt endured hardships that tested their endurance.

Canadian prairie agriculture is characterized by people determined to succeed. One thing that has not changed is the farmers' sense of pride and many farmers still prefer to put on a stiff upper lip regardless of how bad things get.

We still have our pride and fortunately the facilitators of this letter campaign have pried a few stiff upper lips into telling their story.

The insolence and cold-hearted responses of our nation's politicians show a pathetic lack of appreciation for what farmers are sacrificing in terms of economic stability, mental anguish and family discord.

(1515)

And, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of letters that I would actually like to table with the House that are written by people of farm families. And if one of the pages could come and take these so that they're on the record, I'm sure the entire House would appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, the agriculture economy is so important to the overall well-being of Saskatchewan, it's incredibly naïve to believe that the current crisis situation is only affecting 50,000 farmers. Everyone who is in business in this province is feeling or will soon feel the pinch, and everyone who works for those businesses will feel the effects soon after that. Whether you're a farmer today or you're a business person in the middle of Regina or Saskatoon who has never been to a farm in your life, this crisis will touch you in some way, shape, or form.

For that reason it is important that we are united in our quest to get some much needed financial assistance for our farmers. It is important that despite the political differences between the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party, we show the rest of Canada we are on the same side of this debate as far as what we believe the federal government should be doing. I will return to this matter

in just a few minutes.

We make no secret of the fact that we have differences with the current government especially when it comes to agriculture policy. We have been vocal in our criticism that the provincial government was so unwilling to acknowledge the serious nature of this crisis until the past few months, even though it was apparent going back to the spring of 1998 that real trouble was ahead.

When we first raised the issue of problems on the horizon, or that problems were on the horizon in May 1998, we were told to stop playing the politics of fear. Yet here we are in the midst of the worst crisis in agriculture in many years and the people's fear is now the fear of their government.

We have been very critical of the government's decision to cancel the GRIP program without having a viable alternative in place. Today Saskatchewan has the weakest farm safety net in Canada, something that has contributed to the extent of the problems that we face today. And we have been critical of the provincial government for not being at the table when the AIDA program was designed in order to better put Saskatchewan's interest forward.

On September 16 the voters of our province said you have failed agriculture and you have betrayed farmers, something must be done. And I want to make it clear today that we are not absolving the provincial government of these serious misjudgements, and we will continue to question the provincial government about its own decisions in relation to agriculture.

But today, we as a province, must also focus our energy to getting the attention of the federal government, which so far has been less than sympathetic to the situation Saskatchewan finds it in. Indeed, in many ways the federal government has been downright disrespectful of our farmers and of our province.

Case in point, Mr. Speaker: the Prime Minister's failure to meet with farmers and their organizations in Ottawa or to come out here to Saskatchewan and see our problems first-hand. We want to make it clear that because the severe downturn in commodity prices is related almost entirely to the resumption of the subsidy battle between Europe and the United States that this is an international trade issue and therefore a huge responsibility rests with our national government.

Once again that is not to say the province does not have a role to play here because it most certainly does. However with the amount of money that we are talking about, it is unrealistic to think that the provincial government can foot the bill for \$1 billion we all feel is needed to see us through this short-term cash crunch, plus invest dollars into safety nets and additional dollars for highways and education.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are people in the country today looking in who feel that their tax dollars should not be used to help farmers. They say government isn't there to bail them out then why . . . doesn't bail them out when they're in trouble, so why should the government help farmers. Well, I'll tell you why.

I offer a small analogy for them. I tell them to imagine that they

run or work for a business in which their prices are set for them by the government, where those prices are dependent on prices driven down by subsidies in other countries, where they can't sell some of their products until the federal government tells them they can, and where the federal government is essentially their only legal selling agent. Also, and most importantly, they must sell their product for a lower price than they did three decades ago when their costs including taxes are currently based on 1999 rates.

That in a nutshell is what farmers are facing today and that is the reason why the government very much has a responsibility to farmers in situations like this, a situation that is totally beyond the control of our producers.

We have a situation in this province today that has been compared for good reason to that of the 1930s. This is the deepest downturn in the provincial farm economy since that time and so far the federal government's response has been to nearly ignore the situation.

We have a Prime Minister that only a few weeks ago stood proudly before the representatives of other democracies and stated that Canada's federal system allows people in one part of the country to lend a hand to others when they are in trouble. Yet this has not been the case for Saskatchewan farmers.

Nearly everything the federal Liberals have done to address this farm crisis appears to have been geared towards farmers in central Canada. The much reviled AIDA program is working out fairly well for farmers in Ontario and Quebec but the nature of farming on the prairies is very different and this program has not taken into account those differences.

One of the letters that I just tabled in the House, Mr. Speaker, a farmwife who has been married to a farmer who has been farming for 35 years says in one paragraph:

In 1998, we collected crop insurance. We have put money into NISA but have had to remove it in order to pay the bills. In other words, things are really tough on our farm. We have exhausted the existing safety nets.

Then another paragraph says:

AIDA is a farce. We applied for AIDA, taking the application to our accountant, only to be told that we did not qualify and being presented with a bill for his services. Tell me how that is supposed to help farmers.

The sense I get from many people I talk to throughout Saskatchewan is the same as we heard during the late '70s and early '80s when western alienation was at its height. People have moved past the feeling that the federal government doesn't understand the problem out here to the feeling that the feds simply don't care. And quite frankly and very sadly, it's hard to argue with them given what has gone over . . . what has gone on over the past year.

As I said in Ottawa a few weeks ago, I truly believe this is a test of the federation. One cannot imagine the federal government turning its back on a major industry in central Canada if the auto industry or the steel industry or the supply-managed

agriculture sector were facing the same circumstances as prairie agriculture is today. Does one truly believe that it would be treated with a yawn and a shrug like we've seen here in Saskatchewan?

But in the long term, Mr. Speaker, we need a strategy that will allow us to avoid the situation repeating itself. We need a safety net in place that is effective, sustainable, predictable, and we need a level international playing field for agriculture trade. Nobody wants to go through this every few years because it is counterproductive and it is very damaging to the agriculture industry as a whole.

As I conclude today, I want to leave this message again with the non-farmers who may be watching. There is no group in this province that dislikes asking for help from governments more than farmers do. There is no group that finds this more distasteful. They just want a fair chance to succeed on the basis of hard work and sound management. That fair chance is now not even remotely possible. It's clear they do need help; indeed our whole province does.

Mr. Speaker, with that I end my comments because we as MLAs are here to listen to what our farmers and our farm leaders have to say. I want to thank them publicly for all that they have done and for all that they will do. The official opposition has counted it a privilege to work with them. I urge all members to hear their words very carefully and I can only pray that the federal government is finally ready to listen and to do the right thing.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the amendment, or the motion, as introduced by the Premier, the hon. member for Riversdale, and I'm looking forward to the input to the committee as that motion is carried. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And certainly this is my first opportunity to speak to the Legislative Assembly as a newly elected member, the member from Saskatoon Northwest. Primarily it's an urban riding, two small rural polls associated with it; but it is absolutely a pleasure on my part to be speaking with regard to our farm community and our farm families.

My grandparents came to Saskatchewan at the turn of the century. They farmed the land, they homesteaded in the Dysart and Cupar area. Both of my parents grew up on a family farm and we still have close roots with our cousins, aunts, and uncles who farm in Saskatchewan, so it certainly is a pleasure for me to be speaking as my first speech to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, as farming goes, so goes Saskatchewan. We have seen over the years our economy diversifying into other commodity sectors such as oil, potash, timber, and uranium. But the importance of agriculture remains the same.

Agriculture provides about one sixth of the economic output of Saskatchewan, accounting for about 6 billion in commodity sales in good years. Agricultural exports are by far the largest category of exports in the province and account for approximately 46 per cent of total Saskatchewan exports. In fact, Saskatchewan agricultural exports account for 38 per cent

of all Canadian agricultural exports.

Between 1997 and 1998 Saskatchewan family farms were still among, and are still among, the most efficient and productive in the world. But the international subsidy war has dropped the value of our farm commodities by close to \$400 million per year. This crop year they could drop as much as another 600 million. That is a drop of close to \$1 billion in annual farm commodity sales as a direct result of the international subsidy war.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farmers are as efficient as any in the world. They have proven their ability to compete in Canadian and international markets. Their ability to compete is rooted in the natural cost advantages in Saskatchewan as well as the innovative spirit and adaptability of our producers. However, efficiency and innovative spirit alone can only take farmers so far when they are forced to compete with the treasuries of foreign governments and when international markets pressure farm incomes.

We need long-term solutions but we can't risk losing 20,000 farm families to foreclosures in the near future. We need to make Ottawa understand our farmers are Canadians just as well as every other Canadian in Canada. They need national protection as much as anyone else.

The Government of Saskatchewan doesn't have deep enough pockets to take on the grain subsidies of European or American treasuries, nor do Saskatchewan farm families. The simple fact is, if farmers are getting paid what their crops were worth, rather than a price controlled by the European and American subsidies, there would not be a farm crisis. This farm crisis is the direct result of the international grain subsidy war and it can only be resolved in the long term at a national level.

The situation is not going to get easier. The forecast over the next few years by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada show low farm incomes will continue. We have to act now. We have been trying to get Ottawa to listen. We have to do more; we must do more.

However when you look at the statistics, statistics from the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) Producers Support Estimate of Total Support to all Agriculture Commodities in 1998, this shows Canadian farmers are subsidized at \$17 US per acre, compared to \$45 US per acre for American farmers and a whopping \$362 US per acre for European farmers. And that's what our farm families are trying to compete with.

This can't go on. We need the national government, we need the national role, we need solutions soon.

Since the farm delegation went to Ottawa there have been stories in the media about a new mood of western separatism, a feeling by our farmers we have been abandoned by our national government. Ottawa must understand we are just as much Canadians as people who are living east of Thunder Bay. We need solutions to deal with this trade crisis, not just on trade policy, but also on dealing with input costs and the cost of transportation.

(1530)

Since the Crow benefit was eliminated in 1995 we have seen a loss of \$320 million a year taken from the pockets of our farm families while their transportation costs have tripled. The federal government must take immediate action to ensure that producers benefit from railway productivity gains in the same way that would happen in a truly competitive environment.

Saskatchewan farmers cannot be expected to adjust in the span of just a few years to losing half their net income from federal transportation policy changes. The dollars the federal government is saving because of those changes need to go back towards supporting Saskatchewan agricultural producers in these difficult times.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farmers are facing one of the worst overall income situations on record — an income shortfall of \$1 billion over the last two years with a poor income outlook ahead for the year 2000. Many of our farm families are facing the immediate risk of financial failure. Many more are facing a crisis in their short-term financial supports and prospects as well. This is affecting our farm families in the rural and urban economies that serve and depend on the agricultural industry.

While a long-term solution depends on WTO talks — a trade resolution — there is no short-term solution through the WTO. We respectfully ask the federal government for a one billion agricultural trade equalization payment for Saskatchewan farm families. We need to have the federal government provide for help now to help our farm families, whether the American and European trade subsidies storm . . . was that one billion? Did I say one billion? The payment should be made through a program that ensures all commodities are covered fairly and effectively.

We need a stronger long-term safety net to deal with situations like this in the future. We cannot maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace with other farmers getting several times more support from their national governments. Effective long-term safety nets and other national initiatives must be developed to provide the stability and environment needed for our agricultural industry to grow.

As mentioned, my parents grew up on family farms. They grew up in a Saskatchewan where if one family was hurting, then everyone pitched in to help them out until the family got back on its feet again. Saskatchewan people come from a background where we help without asking because you never know when you'll need that help yourself.

I hope those values of helping your neighbour are not limited to just Saskatchewan. I hope those values are something we share with all Canadians because if we have lost those values, then what do we stand for as Canadians in our country of Canada?

We are here today, working and hoping that Canada does work and can work for all its people. Mr. Speaker, we are working today to send a message that we are not going to give up, that we are not going away, because these are our families and our

friends we are talking about, and in Saskatchewan you don't turn your back on your family or your friends.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — As Leader of the Liberal Party in this coalition government, I am pleased to join with my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly in voicing my support for our farm families and I am pleased to support the motion. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move, by leave of the Assembly, seconded by the member for Moose Jaw North:

That this Assembly do now recess to allow the Standing Committee on Agriculture to meet in the Legislative Chamber commencing in 15 minutes from the adoption of this motion and that this Assembly reconvene at the call of the Speaker by ringing of the division bells five minutes in advance of reconvening.

I so move this.

The Speaker: — I would ask the Minister of Agriculture if you would like to adjourn debate on the motion.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — I do want to adjourn debate but I just want to make sure of the rules, that it doesn't interrupt my opportunity to get back into the debate after the conclusion of the committee meeting.

The Speaker: — It will not interfere with your ability to enter back into the debate.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I would move we adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — Okay, the debate has been adjourned by the Deputy Government House Leader and you've heard the motion. Leave has been requested to move for a recess. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

The Speaker: — This House will then recess till the call of the bell, to recall members . . . Oh, I'm sorry. The motion is:

That this Assembly do now recess to allow the Standing Committee on Agriculture to meet in the Legislative Chamber in 15 minutes from the adoption from this motion, to reconvene at the call of the Speaker by the ringing of the division bells five minutes in advance of reconvening.

Motion agreed to.

The Assembly recessed for a period of time.

