

The Assembly met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present petitions on behalf of citizens of Saskatchewan concerned about the automobile insurance Act. And the prayer reads as follows, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to repeal the provision of the personal injuries benefit contained in the automobile insurance Act and adopt a return to an add-on insurance system that would provide benefits on a no-fault basis to all victims without taking away the innocent victim's right to seek compensation from the person responsible for the accident, but with appropriate modifications to reduce overall personal injury costs.

And the signatories on this petition, Mr. Speaker, are from Humboldt, from Burr, Saskatchewan, from Clavet and Regina and other places throughout the province. I so present.

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition this morning . . . or this afternoon on behalf of the citizens of this province regarding concerns they have with the automobile insurance Act:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to repeal the provision of the personal injury benefits contained in the automobile insurance Act and adopt a return to an add-on insurance system that would provide benefits on a no-fault basis to all victims without taking away the innocent victim's right to seek compensation from the persons responsible for the accident, but with appropriate modifications to reduce overall personal injury costs.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is from the good citizens of Wolseley, Glenavon, Pilot Butte, Prince Albert. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of Saskatchewan citizens regarding the automobile insurance Act. The petition is as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to repeal the provision of the personal injury benefit contained in the automobile insurance Act and adopt a return to an add-on insurance system that would provide benefits on a no-fault basis to all victims without taking away the innocent victim's rights to seek compensation from the person responsible for the accident but with appropriate modifications to reduce overall personal injury costs.

And this petition is signed by people from Saskatoon, Hanley, and the Humboldt area.

I so do present.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well to present a petition and reading the prayer:

Wherefore your petitions humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to repeal the provision of the personal injury benefits contained on the automobile insurance Act and adopt a return to an add-on insurance system that would provide benefits on a no-fault basis to all victims without taking away the innocent victim's right to seek compensation from the person responsible for the accident but with appropriate modifications to reduce overall personal injury costs.

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

Mr. Speaker, the petition I present is signed by individuals from the communities of Wynyard, Indian Head, Quinton, Carievale, and Regina.

I so present.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too rise to present petitions. And I read the prayer:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to repeal the provision of the personal injury benefits contained in the automobile insurance Act and adopt a return to an add-on insurance system that would provide benefits on a no-fault basis to all victims without taking away the innocent victim's right to seek compensation from the person responsible for the accident but with appropriate modifications to reduce overall injury costs.

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

And these are signed by good people from Warman, Humboldt, St. Louis, Prince Albert, and Saskatoon.

I so present.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice of motion for the first reading of a Bill. I give notice that on Friday next, I will move the first reading of a Bill entitled, The Four-year Taxation Plan, 1999.

And further, Mr. Speaker, I give notice of a motion for the first reading of a Bill, for Friday next and would move first reading of that Bill, entitled The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Amendment Act, 1999.

A third notice of motion for the first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move the first reading of a Bill — and I would ask my colleagues across the way to take note — entitled The Respect for Constituents Act.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I give notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the

following question, to the minister of Executive Council:

What role does the Department of Executive Council play in calling and examining requests for proposals from communications firms, marketing firms, market research firms, and polling firms for the work done by all government departments and Crown corporations; and please give a complete rundown on the government's policy in awarding contracts to such agencies for this type of work; and please give a complete list of all contracts of this nature awarded by the government through the Executive Council during the 1998-99 fiscal year; whether the tending process in each case followed government policy; how many companies tendered for each project and which company got final contract; how much the contract was worth; and how many other companies bid on a contract in each case.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice of motion of the first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1999.

I also give notice of a written question, that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Education: provide a complete list of all in-province and out-of-province travel undertaken by you in your capacity of minister and please state which ministerial assistants accompanied you on each trip.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Accountability of Subsidiaries of Subsidiary Crown Corporation Act.

And while I'm on my feet, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: what is the policy for awarding contracts by the Crowns from communication firms, marketing firms, market research firms, or polling companies; what role does Executive Council play in awarding contracts of these types by the Crown corporations? And please give a complete listing of all contracts of this type awarded by Crown corporations so far in 1999; how many of these tenders follow government policy; how many firms bid on each job and how much each contract was worth; and how many companies bid on each contract?

Thank you.

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too give notice for motion for the first reading of a Bill on Friday and . . . the Bill entitled The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice of written questions. I give notice that I shall, on day no. 8, ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal

Affairs: how much provincial funding went for services on Indian reserves in Saskatchewan in 1995 and '96? And, Mr. Speaker, I have similar questions pertaining to the years 1996-97, and 1997 — rather 1998-99.

I also give notice that I shall ask the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs the following question:

How much provincial funding in 1999-2000 is budgeted to go to on-reserve services in Saskatchewan; and what are these services?

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I have a further question to the Minister of Finance:

How much did the First Nations' exemption from paying the PST (provincial sales tax) cost the provincial government in 1996, 1997? And I have similar questions, Mr. Speaker, for the years 1997-98, and 1998. 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice of motion of the first reading of two Bills. The first is that I give notice that I shall on day no. 10 move first reading of a Bill entitled The Government Accountability Act. And I give notice that I shall on day no. 10 move first reading of a Bill entitled The Balanced Budget Act, 1999.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I give notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: what effect does the bankruptcy of Eaton's department store have on the mortgages held by the provincial government against Cadillac Fairview and Eaton's, due to mature on December 1, 2001?

Thank you.

Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Agriculture Implements Amendment Act, 1999.

And I also have a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Agriculture: what mode of transportation did he use to attend the recent World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle? How many staff members accompanied him? And did any members of his immediate family accompany him on the trip?

Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise as well to give notice of the first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Health-care Funding Audit Act.

I also give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Health Ombudsman Act.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: please provide a complete listing of all new charges SaskTel has placed on in-home service calls since January 1, 1999; and what new charges of this type are planned to be put into place in the year 2000?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 1999 (Appointment of Directors).

I as well give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: how many middle management positions within your department have had their jobs terminated since you became minister?

Mr. Peters: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move the first reading of a Bill, The Health District Amendment Act, 1999 (Elected Boards).

And while I'm standing, I'd like to ask the question . . . I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Education: please provide a complete list of all ministerial assistants employed in your ministerial office and their salaries.

Thank you.

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give notice of motion for first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Vehicle Administration Amendment Act, 1999.

And I will also give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: what mode of transportation did he use to attend the recent World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle; how many staff members accompanied him; and did any members of his immediate family accompany him on the trip?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Justice System Review Act, 1999.

And, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Referendum and Plebiscite Act, 1999.

And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Justice: what specific role, if any, did the deputy minister of Justice play in drafting the coalition agreement between the Liberal Party of Saskatchewan and the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan, dated September 29, 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bakken: — I give notice of motion for first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Health Districts Amendment Act, 1999 (Block Funding).

While I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: how much has the advertising and communication budget within your department been reduced since you became minister.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Saskatchewan Farm Security Amendment Act, 1999.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: how much has been cut from all Crown legal, polling, and consulting budgets since October 1, 1999.

Also I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Education: how much is the advertising and communications budget within your department been reduced since you became minister.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Property Rights Act.

I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of CIC: how much has been cut from the Crown corporations advertising budget since October 1, 1999.

And I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: how much is the Government of Saskatchewan spending on the program known as the Three Century Club wherein portions of the Trans Canada Trail is purchased in the name of certain senior citizens to mark the new millennium.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I

shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act 1999, (Votes of Confidence).

And while I'm on my feet, I also give notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: please provide a complete list of all the ministerial assistants employed from your ministerial office and their salaries.

Thank you.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give notice of motion of first reading a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Construction Tendering Agreement Nullification Act.

And also while I'm standing, I'd like to give notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Education: how many middle management positions within your department have been terminated since you became minister?

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make notice of a motion for first reading of a Bill. I will give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled The Crown Corporation Managers' and Permanent Heads' Salaries Act.

While I'm on my feet, I'd like to make notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following:

To the Premier: please provide the number of full-time equivalent positions that have been eliminated in Executive Council since October 1, 1999 and how money has been saved with these staff reductions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill entitled, The Trade Union Amendment Act, 1999. And while I'm on my feet, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Premier: how many positions have been eliminated from the Executive Council's house business and research office since October 1, 1999; and how much money has this reduction saved?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Wakefield: — I give notice that I shall Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Regulatory Reform Act; and I also give notice of a written question. I give notice that I shall on day 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Premier: how many positions have been eliminated in the Executive Council's communications, co-ordination, and media services office since October 1, 1999; and how much money has this reduction saved?

Mr. Wiberg: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Amendment Act, 1999 (Foreign Investments). And, Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs: to provide a complete list of all in-province and out-of-province travel undertaken by you in your capacity of minister; and please state which ministerial assistants accompanied you on each trip.

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice of a first reading of a Bill. I give notice that I shall on Friday next move the first reading of a Bill entitled, The Crown Corporations Rate Review Act, 1999. And while I'm on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I also give notice of a written question. I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Post-Secondary Education: please explain any role your department has played in the current efforts to keep the Canadian Bible College in Regina; and has there been an offer to the Canadian Bible College and the Canadian Theological Seminary about taking a place in the Knowledge Corridor in southeast Regina.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move first reading of a Bill, The Education and Health Amendment Act, 1999. Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish to give notice of written question. I give notice that I shall on day no. 8 ask the government the following question:

To the minister responsible for Crown Corporations: why was the city of Moose Jaw denied the opportunity to set up its own enhanced 911 system, a system that would have cost taxpayers substantially less than what they will now have to pay to get emergency services routed through Swift Current.

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I shall on Friday next move the first reading of a Bill, The Crown Corporations Disclosure Act, and further, Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on day no. 8 I will ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of the Crown Investments Corporation: how many middle management positions have been eliminated in Saskatchewan's Crown corporations since October 1, 1999; and how much money have these reductions saved? Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Eagles: — Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a friend of mine and my family's. Len Gustafson served as my Member of Parliament

from 1979 till 1993. He is in town today to attend the agricultural meetings that took place this morning in Regina. And so I'd like you to please join me in welcoming Senator Gustafson.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the House two constituents of mine who are sitting in the west gallery — Brett and Sylvia Quiring.

Brett is a university student at the U of R (University of Regina) here in Regina and he's also my constituency association president. And I see he's joined here today with his sister . . . I mean mother, Sylvia. And I want to welcome them here and hope they enjoy the proceedings. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, we've had so many special occasions in this House recently — several elections, a least a couple of swearing-ins, a Throne Speech, and I can't name them all.

I'd like to introduce today two people who've been on the floor of this House as often as I have — my wife and my daughter, up in the gallery, Marilyn and Brooklyn.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would simply like to add my words of welcome to Senator Gustafson. It was a pleasure last week to be able to spend considerable time with the senator and get to know him very well as we were both "sleepless in Seattle".

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to the members of the Assembly it's my privilege to introduce two residents of southwest Saskatchewan from the Glentworth area — Yogi Huyghebaert and Murray Cheesman. I'd ask all hon. members to make them welcome in the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to all members of the Legislative Assembly, my father, Roy Atkinson, former president of the National Farmers Union and a long-time advocate for farm families in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I was pleased that my father was able to watch the historic proceedings that took place yesterday on the floor of the legislature. And I was reminded when I was watching him sitting there that he has spent over 40 years of his life representing farmers in the province of Saskatchewan. And I also thought that some things haven't changed a lot in the last 40 years, and in fact a lot of things have gone backwards.

And so with that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to welcome my father to the legislature and I hope he enjoys the legislative

proceedings. Thank you.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Bakken: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have the Assembly welcome my nieces, Rhonda and Rebecca Knibbs. They're from North Battleford.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, through you and to the Assembly, I would like to extend a warm welcome to a good friend of mine, Bill Missal from Lang, Saskatchewan. He and I have followed career paths for about the last 20 years, but as of September 16, I've kind of "y'd" off in a different direction. So I'd like to welcome Bill Missal.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regina to Host Memorial Cup in 2001

Mr. Kasperski: — Mr. Speaker, on Monday our city of Regina, and indeed the province as a whole, received some very good news. Our hockey team, the Regina Pats were awarded the right to host the Memorial Cup in the year 2001. Regina won out over bids by Calgary, Lethbridge, and Kelowna.

This is great news for us for a number of reasons.

First of course, Mr. Speaker, our city and its attractions will be showcased in the national media. The tournament will provide an immediate boost to our economy and a longer term payoff as those who watch on TV will want to come and see more of the city.

The tournament will show our excellent sport facilities as well as our commitment to, and support of, junior hockey.

Finally, and perhaps most of all, Mr. Speaker, the 2001 Memorial Cup will enhance once again to our nation Regina's reputation as a host city for elite sporting events. After all, we have this decade hosted the Grey Cup, the Scott Tournament of Hearts, the Brier, and the Western Hockey League all-star game. With that kind of experience behind us this event is certain to be a success.

We won this bid because of excellent work by a committee headed by Ron Clark. I congratulate the committee, also general manager Brent Parker, and all the Regina Pats organization, and express our gratitude for their hard-won success.

Mr. Speaker, I'll be there in 2001 and I hope other members will be as well. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the Regina Pat organization and the city of Regina on their successful bid for hosting the Memorial Cup in the year 2001. No doubt the bid was successful due to the long history of the Regina Pat organization as well as the

very successful undertakings of the city of Regina on many events such as the Grey Cup and the Scott Tournament of Hearts, just two events just recently.

So I too would like to congratulate them and I will be there also. So I hope every other member is too. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Provincial Farm Support

Mr. Addley: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and an urban MLA I want to say how interesting, how educational, and how motivating I found yesterday's extended debate on the crisis facing Saskatchewan farmers. I knew some things, perhaps not as well as I ought, and now I know more. As my colleague from Regina Northeast said, it was good to have a human face put on the troubles faced by today's farm families.

I was also pleased by the fact that all three parties put aside any partisan game-playing in the face of such a severe problem. And, Mr. Speaker, although we all agree that the solution to this international problem lies in the hands of the government appointed to deal with international affairs, the federal government, it was good to see the chart produced by our Minister of Agriculture which shows Saskatchewan expenditures in support of agriculture.

(1400)

In particular it was useful to see in plain figures that Saskatchewan leads the nation in per capita spending on agriculture by a very large margin. Mr. Speaker, we spend almost \$300 for every man, woman, and child in this province to support our farm sector. Ontario by contrast spends a munificent \$27, and Premier Harris is threatening to pull out of national support programs. Alberta comes in at \$129, respectable, but not in the ballpark.

So, Mr. Speaker, to those who say we should do more we say, yes we should. But to those who say we do nothing we say, check the facts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sturgis Student Wins Poster Contest

Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the achievement of a young individual from my constituency. Daniel Michaluk, a grade 8 student at the Sturgis comprehensive school is one of 13 Saskatchewan students to have their art work selected for the year 2000 farm safety calendar.

Over 2,000 students from 105 schools across Saskatchewan submitted entries to this year's poster contest. The contest was open to all students from kindergarten to grade 9. Prizes were awarded to three age groups in four safety categories, including machinery safety, yard and livestock safety, chemical and poisonous gas safety, and electrical and fire safety.

Daniel's entry in the machinery safety category depicted a

farmer getting caught by the power takeoff shaft of a tractor-driven haybine. A very realistic drawing of a scene that occurs far too often on Saskatchewan's farms.

I want to commend the Sturgis comprehensive school and Daniel Michaluk for promoting a most important goal, the prevention of needless accidents on the farm. I would ask all members to join me in congratulating Daniel Michaluk and the other 2,000 participants for recognizing the importance of farm safety. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Economic Diversification

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this Assembly members have debated for decades the need for provincial economic diversity. If all our eggs in one basket, the argument goes, everything gets scrambled if the basket drops. We must be doing something right, Mr. Speaker, because although we all recognize the seriousness of the agricultural situation, other sectors of our economy are performing beyond expectations.

Housing is a good example. Construction of homes and apartments in Saskatchewan are outstripping last year's pace. According to the Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, the report says that Saskatchewan in 1999 may surpass the number of starts in 1998, which saw the highest level of starts in a decade. Housing starts were up 5 per cent with 1,956 starts by the end of October.

It pains me to say, however, Mr. Minister, the biggest advance was in the city of Saskatoon, although Regina and many other cities posted modest growth as well.

But I should say that in Regina in the month of November, housing sales grew by 12 per cent over November a year ago. These numbers are all the more remarkable, Mr. Minister, because nationally housing starts have slipped by 2.2 per cent.

We're not completely there yet, Mr. Minister, but we are closer to the day when the booms and busts of the previous years can be smoothed out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

New Beginnings Housing Co-operative

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add to the comments made by the member from Regina Dewdney on the housing boom in Saskatchewan, particularly because there is a fine example of this boom in Prince Albert.

The New Beginnings Housing Co-operative is only two years old, but already it's a big part of the community development in Prince Albert. In fact this October, New Beginnings received a Saskatchewan co-operative enterprise award for its work in helping families afford their own homes — a dream that otherwise couldn't have been realized.

The co-op creates local jobs; it helps rejuvenate

neighbourhoods and creates a sense of pride for people through owning their own homes.

I'd like to thank New Beginnings for their hard work and important role in the Prince Albert housing program.

Mr. Speaker, and members, please join me in congratulating the co-op on their latest achievements.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

Financial Support for Farmers

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, yesterday farmers and farm groups came here to the legislature and delivered two clear messages. One group after another called for a billion dollars of trade equalization payments from Ottawa. And we agree.

But one group after another also said that your government needs to do more.

The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool challenged you to develop a workable, long-term safety net program. United Grain Growers noted that Saskatchewan farmers pay the highest fuel taxes in the Prairie provinces. The National Farmers Union challenged you to lower the education portion of property tax.

Almost every group made proposals your government can and should be taking. The message was coming through loud and clear. Mr. Premier, did you get the message? What steps is your government going to take to address the farm crisis?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, I want again to remind all members of the House and the public at large that I think it is very, very important that we keep our focus on where the main solution to this very complex and difficult problem lies, and that is at the national and at the international level. This is absolutely critical.

We are committed to doing what we can do at the provincial level. The Speech from the Throne talks about such things as withdrawing ... talks about withdrawing from AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) and putting the money into relief programs. It talks about high input costs facing farmers and ways to reduce them. The crop insurance — improving the coverage and looking at the costs. A farm input monitoring program.

I could go on. Leasebacks for three years, inviting the federal government to join. Even the question of lands branch action, the Provincial Action Committee on the Rural Economy and the like.

I'll be very brief in closing by saying that we are taking all of these suggestions under very serious and active consideration and remind the members of the House, as the member from Saskatoon did in his member's statement a few moments ago, in this province the taxpayers of this province, all the taxpayers,

fund to the extent and support Saskatchewan farmers \$300 per capita. That's two and one-half times more than the nearest province. We will continue to do that and even more as our funds permit.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well let's talk a bit about the focus on the billion dollars from Ottawa. Just yesterday members of this Assembly unanimously passed a motion urging the Government of Canada to immediately provide \$1 billion to Saskatchewan farm families facing the worst farm crisis since the 1930s.

Mr. Premier, this morning your Minister of Agriculture appeared to forget this motion. Your minister indicated to the media he would be very discouraged if there was no relief for farmers in the next federal budget.

Mr. Premier, that budget is not expected until March. Saskatchewan farm families cannot wait until March or later. Farmers need help immediately. That means now.

Mr. Premier, your Minister of Agriculture appears to be following the same path as your former minister of Agriculture — content to sit back and wait for action from the federal government.

Mr. Premier, why is the Minister of Agriculture not repeating the motion passed here yesterday, unanimously, when he speaks on this issue? Mr. Premier, are you telling the Saskatchewan farmers they will now have to wait many, many more months for help from the federal government?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, the farm coalition, which comprises all the farm leadership that we heard — most of them we heard yesterday in what I thought was a very fine day for the Legislative Assembly and really was a great experiment in democracy — argues that we should have a billion dollars for the people of the province of Saskatchewan now. And the position of the provincial government is that money should take place now.

And rather than concentrating on what the provincial Minister of Agriculture is reported to have said, I would say to the Leader of the Opposition he should be mindful of what the Liberal Chair of the Commons agricultural committee said.

And the notation I have from a recent news report says, quote (this is Mr. Harvard):

The Chrétien government has to do more to help struggling prairie farmers. He says he won't promise an amount but he says it's now clear to him that farmers need more assistance than the federal government is currently offering.

Now that is a huge step forward and I'd like to think that working together we achieved that huge step forward. And that money should come forward as quickly as possible and before the end of the year.

But I'll close by saying this, Mr. Speaker. Members will, I think, acknowledge the fact, as will the journalists who observed the proceedings, that many speakers in their presentations yesterday said that if we missed that December deadline, the next obvious no-miss deadline has got to be that spring budget. That is what I'm sure the Minister of Agriculture of Saskatchewan is referring to. But we want the money now.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're underwhelmed by your resolve and determination.

There's another message coming out of the farm crisis and that is the growing sense of western alienation. According to media reports, you have been talking to the Prime Minister about a Quebec strategy and the Prime Minister has been asking for your support. The Prime Minister wants Saskatchewan's support to make this country work.

Now that's a fair request, but it's also a two-way street. When are we going to get something in return?

Mr. Premier, you spoke to the Prime Minister about the national unity issue as recently as Monday of this week. Did you raise the farm crisis during that conversation, and if so, what was his response?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, on any occasion that I have the opportunity to speak to the Prime Minister of Canada, I discuss with him the urgency and the crisis of the farm situation in western Canada. I do so both in verbal communications and the meetings with had with the coalition in Ottawa a couple of months ago. I do so in correspondence. And I will continue to do so.

If, however, implied in the member's statement/question is that there should be a bargaining of this great country called Canada in exchange for . . . no matter how difficult the problems may be, I have to disagree with him.

And I might remind the Leader of the Opposition that even his former colleague, the Reform Member of Parliament, Mr. Kerpan, who came before the members of this House and who so eloquently spoke on this issue — and captivated the attention of everybody on that side of the House — clearly and unequivocally said we should never bargain Canada when it comes to our differences as important as those differences are.

The question to me is, do I speak to the Prime Minister about this issue? The answer? I always have and I always will. And I'm going to continue to fight for the farmers of Saskatchewan, and I'm going to repeat my plea to the people of Canada and the Prime Minister: we need your help now, we need your support; it's the fair and just thing to do for Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

The Speaker: — Order, order, please. We'd like to hear the

question from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Hermanson: — Well I heard some emotion over there but I sure didn't hear an answer to my question so I presume that on Monday the Premier didn't raise the farm crisis here in Saskatchewan; that he has no good news coming out of that meeting whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party supports a strong and united Canada. Make no doubt about that. But we also understand the growing sense of alienation that many Saskatchewan people are feeling.

(1415)

When Jean Chrétien needs an ally for his national unity strategy, he turns to his old pal, the Premier of Saskatchewan. But when the Premier needs support for Saskatchewan farmers, Jean Chrétien gives him the bum's rush out of the door.

Mr. Premier, these two issues are related. If Jean Chrétien wants Saskatchewan support to make Canada work, then Saskatchewan deserves his support to make Canada work. And that starts now with a billion dollar trade equalization payment from Ottawa.

Mr. Premier, will you deliver that message to the Prime Minister?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, if I received the bum's rush when I was in Ottawa, I must say that I was in somewhat good company or — well depending on your point of view — because there were a lot of bums from over that side that got the same rush as we did. In fact a lot, a lot of the same bums got the rush in Manitoba. And so this is not a question of personality. I say to the . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order, please. I really would like to hear the answer to that question.

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately the members, the members of the so-called Saskatchewan Party do not want to hear the answer to the question.

So my answer to this question is this, Mr. Speaker — we remain committed. And I really do appeal to the Leader of the Opposition to keep the eye on the ball. The eye on the ball here is this immediate subsidy crisis, and the need for us at a non-partisan, non-political level, and with as much unity of the farm coalition as possible, to keep pursuing this issue.

I repeat again, as I said in my earlier answer, any time I get a chance to talk to the Prime Minister or anybody else on this issue, I advocate the position of the farm coalition and will continue to do so for our family farms.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Funding of Health Care for Patient

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for

the Minister of Health. Madam Minister, it's been almost three months since the election and nothing has changed. Hospital waiting lists are getting longer, nurses and doctors are still leaving, and the health care bureaucracy is still stifling any attempt at improving front-line services. Here's a graphic and disturbing example.

Edward Ens of Codette contacted me a few weeks ago to tell me a story that could only happen in NDP (New Democratic Party) Saskatchewan. Mr. Ens suffers from a rare blood disease called T-cell lymphoma. Since there are no facilities to adequately treat him in Saskatchewan, he must travel once a month to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. But now Mr. Ens has been informed by Sask. Health that they will no longer pay for this treatment.

Madam Minister, you were contacted by Mr. Ens over a month ago about this. He still hasn't had a response. Will you explain? Will Mr. Ens's treatment be cut off by Saskatchewan Health?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded that the opposition health critic and his assistant health critic visited my office some weeks ago, and one of the commitments that that member made was that he would work through my office in order to resolve problems. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm a bit surprised that he is raising this issue in the legislature given his commitment that he made to us that he would work through our office in the name of co-operation to resolve issues, Mr. Speaker.

What I can say to the member, as well, is that the information and privacy Act in this province does not allow me to comment on any individual case before the legislature. What I can say to the member is that we will continue to work to improve health services in this province. As the member knows we spend \$1.95 billion each year in the province of Saskatchewan on health care. We deliver millions of units of services to our province's population and we will continue to improve the health status of Saskatchewan citizens.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, Mr. Ens wrote you over a month ago and he has so far not received one word back and you owe him that courtesy.

Madam Minister, maybe I can help you with more specific information about Mr. Ens's situation. He's under the care of a specialist at Royal University Hospital. He must take treatments in Minnesota. Each of these monthly treatments costs about \$11,600 US (United States). Saskatchewan Health has been funding these treatments for the past 20 months. That means that the Department of Health has spent more than \$230,000 US for these treatments.

Madam Minister, the equipment that is required to perform these treatments only costs about \$38,000 US. That means your government could have purchased the equipment and offered the treatment in Saskatchewan at a massive savings for the province of Saskatchewan.

Can you explain, Madam Minister, why you would allow the expenditure of the \$230,000 US to send one patient for treatment in the United States when you could have saved hundreds of thousands of dollars by purchasing the equipment and using it here in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the member should know is that when services are not available in the province of Saskatchewan, that as a general policy we are able to provide for those services outside of Saskatchewan. This is the kind of provision that we have under Canada's Canada Health Act, Mr. Speaker, and we have reciprocal agreements.

It's not unlike citizens that come to Saskatchewan from Alberta or Manitoba or British Columbia to receive services that may not be available in their home provinces or may not be available on a timely basis.

The other point I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker, is the province of Saskatchewan funds capital construction projects, we fund operating costs; but as a matter of policy, we have not funded equipment that is located in our various facilities. There are some pieces of equipment that we fund on a provincial basis.

Mr. Speaker, obviously the member raises a question; and I will need to look into the exact details of this particular case regarding the equipment and I'll be prepared to report back to the legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefer: — And all of this information was submitted in the letter that Mr. Ens wrote to you over a month ago. So it's really difficult to pretend you don't know what this is all about.

Madam Minister, there was a proposal that I will table with this Assembly and with yourself today, from Mr. Ens's doctor to the Department of Health dated March 9, 1999. The proposal demonstrates how establishing an extracorporeal photophoresis unit in Saskatoon would establish a quality and accessibility of health services in Saskatchewan while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Dr. Peter Hull, the head of dermatology at the Royal University Hospital proposed that the money paid to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester be used instead to buy the medical equipment so the medical treatment could be offered to Saskatchewan residents at lower cost.

I'm also tabling the response from the medical manager, in response to this proposal. According to the medical manager, and I quote:

That would seem to make sense on the face of it.
Regrettably that is not how things work in the real world.

Madam Minister, is that how NDP health care works? Do you agree that even if a proposal makes sense, leads to better health care, and costs less money, the Department of Health shouldn't take action because quote: "that's not how things work in the

real world.”

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can say to the member, and one of the references that was made in the Throne Speech, was the need to clearly define roles and functions of our various partners in health care.

As the opposition will know, Saskatchewan has undergone major health care restructuring in the last six years. Mr. Speaker, we believe that it's time to clearly define roles and functions and to put proper accountability methods in place in terms of how we deliver health services. This means that we're going to be reviewing roles and responsibilities of all of our partners in the health system, including health providers, including districts, including the department, and including the Government of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

We will have these discussions. So clearly accountability and responsibility mechanisms will be put in place.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gantefoer: — Madam Minister, in the world you live in everything seems to just get worse and worse. According to the medical manager of medical services . . . that the Department of Health, and I quote:

There's no way money assigned to physicians' fees can be used to buy equipment.

In other words, Madam Minister, your NDP government is so committed to maintaining a massive, inefficient bureaucracy — that is impossible to change even if that change leads to better health, to more people being serviced at lower cost.

And finally, Madam Minister, your medical director concludes his letter to Dr. Hull by advising him not to hold his breath. Well, Madam Minister, people in Saskatchewan are tired of holding their breath waiting for your government to get its act together. Is that what you're going to do, is tell people to hold their breath?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, you know we have just gone through an interesting process in August and September. And what's interesting in that election campaign, I saw very little information that was coming from the Saskatchewan Party with regards to health care in the province of Saskatchewan. In fact, Mr. Speaker, what the opposition said, was that they were essentially going to freeze health spending in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall in our last budget we increased health spending in this province by 1.9 . . . \$2 billion. Mr. Speaker, in addition there have been special warrants that have in fact increased that.

Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the opposition is that we have . . .

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

Even I'm having a little difficulty hearing the answer.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the people of Saskatchewan is that we have close to 5 million visits to family doctors in this province. We have 926,000 visits to specialists. We have 9,200 nursing home residents; we have 29,000 people that receive home care services. We have over 800,000 days — days, Mr. Speaker — of in-patient care in hospitals in our province. And we have over 650,000 visits to our emergency wards.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the opposition you would swear that nothing positive happens in our health system in the province of Saskatchewan, and I can assure the members opposite that each and every day 35,000 people get service in this province.

Funding for Highway Maintenance

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Highways this afternoon.

Mr. Minister, I read the Throne Speech and reread it, the one that was presented in the House on Monday. It's a well-worn copy, and I thought perhaps the Lieutenant Governor had missed a paragraph. I searched high and low through that document. I even looked under the corner and under the staple here. Maybe it's my eyesight that's failing me, but nowhere could I find mention anywhere about highways in this document.

Now, Mr. Minister, I find it amazing that there would be no mention whatsoever of the provincial road system in the Speech from the Throne. Mr. Minister, all Saskatchewan people and especially farm families depend on highways and our rural road system. Would you please tell me why there was no mention of repairing or maintaining our roads and highways in this Throne Speech?

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I could, first of all, just be given a wee bit of latitude in answering the question. I wanted to take the opportunity, since I may not have it again, to on behalf of my wife's and I part, to be able to thank the opposition and all of the government members for their kind, kind remarks in the birth of our son. I don't know if I'd have that opportunity again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — I've also learned that pothole and slippery when wet are not terms limited solely to the Department of Highways.

I do want to . . . I do want to, Mr. Speaker, also just point out for the member though a number of the things that we are doing. The department in its last past year has improved or restored 830 kilometres of road. The department has also recently released the winter tender schedule, I remind them, 3 weeks earlier than we had before for a total of \$44 million.

And I question the opposition, I guess. All they ask us to do is spend, spend, spend, and they never, ever tell us where that money is supposed to come from.

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, I thank you. I direct this question to the Minister of Education. Mr. Minister, since you joined the NDP, have you made much of the fact that you will use your influence to affect the policy of this government. Mr. Minister, in your election platform, when you were a Liberal, you promised to put every penny collected in fuel taxes into our highways, streets, and roads. You promised to freeze the provincial fuel tax at its current rate and you also promised to change government regulations and stop collecting the fuel tax on farm fuel.

(1430)

Now, Mr. Minister, rural Saskatchewan needs help. And repairing and maintaining our roads and highways is part of that help. Mr. Minister, there is no mention of spending for highways or roads in this Throne Speech that you say that you helped create. There's no mention of the fuel tax either.

Mr. Minister, I ask, if your influence is so great, why is there no mention of any initiative at all to repair Saskatchewan's crumbling road system?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said many times, during the election we did place a tremendous priority on transportation and infrastructure. And I must note that you did review the Throne Speech and there is a reference to infrastructure. There has been a commitment to highways.

But I must also admit that we have a situation in a coalition government where as Leader of the Liberal Party we had a package that was costed out. The New Democrats had a package that was costed out. And together we have put forward a coalition package, and that package talks about health care and education and it talks about zero — where you guys had zero on health, zero on education. And you know what? We will still maintain our Highways budget and move forward an agenda.

Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

TABLING OF REPORTS

The Speaker: — Hon. members, before orders of the day . . . Order, order, please, so we can get on with the business of the House, please.

Hon. members, before orders of the day I lay before the Assembly pursuant to subsection 76 of The Election Act, 1999 a report of the Chief Electoral Officer.

And in accordance of the provisions of The Members' Conflict of Interest Act, I hereby table the 5th annual report of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner as well.

And I also wish to table, in accordance with the Board of Internal Economy directive #22 (1) (g), the members' accountability and disclosure statements for the year ended March 31, 1999.

And finally, in accordance with directive #23 (1) (c), I also table the audited financial statements for each caucus for the year ended March 31, 1999.

Order, order please.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Ruling On A Point of Order

The Speaker: — Yesterday, hon. colleagues, yesterday the Opposition House Leader raised the point of order concerning the language used by the Deputy Premier during oral question period. At the time I indicated that I would review the verbatim and return with a ruling today.

Upon reviewing the record, I can cite two incidents in which the truthfulness of other members is called into question. On page 20, at the bottom of the first column, the Deputy Premier challenged the truthfulness of the Leader of the Opposition, of the Leader of the Opposition's statements and actions. At the time, I did caution all members to choose their words judiciously.

Later, on page 21, the Leader of the Opposition in his last question did himself use language calling into question the veracity of the minister's answer.

In drawing attention to these incidents, I do not want to suggest that these two members were alone in using perhaps questionable language. They are, however, veteran parliamentarians and I ask for their co-operation for establishing a positive example for our newer colleagues in this Assembly to follow.

At the start of a new legislature, I want to remind all members that the language used in the Assembly should be tempered and worthy of the place in which it is spoken. Speakers have consistently ruled that it is not permissible to accuse or even suggest that another hon. member intentionally or inadvertently misled the House. Nor is it acceptable to impugn the character or motives of other members.

And I direct members to Beauchesne Sixth Edition, paragraph 484, subparagraph 3 and 491. And I encourage all members to conduct themselves in their words and in their actions in a manner that demonstrates the respect for one another and for this institution.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Addley.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To say that it's an honour to be standing here today would be a vast understatement. To be selected by one's constituents to represent their views is a big responsibility, and one that I take very seriously.

I've been lucky enough, fortunate enough in my political life to have been elected on two separate occasions by my neighbours in the Rosetown-Biggar area. In 1993 I was elected as a Member of Parliament for the constituency of Kindersley-Lloydminster and served one term in the House of Commons. Now I've been elected once again, this time to the provincial Chamber, to this historic Chamber.

I stand here as the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, an honour that I did not even dream of when I first got involved in politics over a decade ago. It is an honour that I humbly accept, but I am also proud to stand before you as the Leader of the Opposition with people who surround me on the floor today. People who took a chance on a new party, a new party which the Premier now calls the so-called Saskatchewan Party. And that's certainly a step in the right direction, but we are called the Saskatchewan Party. And so I appreciate from the so-called Premier that we are now the so-called Saskatchewan Party.

On September 16, 1999 the people for Saskatchewan, the people of Saskatchewan elected a strong united and talented group that makes up the Saskatchewan Party caucus. Together with nine veteran members of the House who got this party off the ground, our 16 new members bring with them a wealth of talent and backgrounds.

And this is something that their constituents recognized, and it is the reason why they were elected. So I want to salute each and every one of my colleagues on this side of the House today and say thank you to each one of them for being a part of this team that stunned the political world on September 16, 1999.

Nobody, almost nobody predicted the results — not the pundits, not the pollsters, especially not the NDP. Nobody except those on the Saskatchewan Party team. And we knew something was happening because we were actually talking to the people of this province.

We knew that the people were unhappy with the way the government was conducting itself. And, Mr. Speaker, we knew they were ready for a change. Whereas the press declared the election over before it was even called, the public, the voters, the people who count, had different thoughts. And that's why, on September 16, the Saskatchewan Party received the most votes of any party running in the election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hermanson: — Mr. Speaker, it's worth noting that this was the very first election campaign for the Saskatchewan Party, and look at the results. Elected, 25 MLAs — largest opposition this House has seen in many, many, many years. Twenty-three Saskatchewan Party candidates received more votes than the Premier of the province. Ten candidates, ten of my colleagues received more than 4,000 votes. And, Mr. Speaker, two of our candidates received more than 5,000 votes — a little landslide. The member for Cannington and the member for Kelvington-Wadena received over 5,000 members. What an endorsement from their constituents. In 48 ridings, the Saskatchewan Party came either first or second.

But before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the voters in Rosetown-Biggar for putting

their faith in me. Fifty-nine per cent of the votes supported me, almost 5,000 voters.

I particularly want to acknowledge my friends in the Beechy area. They not only supported me politically, but they have been friends and supporters of our family. A friendship and support that goes beyond politics, and we do appreciate those who have supported our family in our life of politics over the last 10 or 11 years. We feel blessed to be from a small rural community in Saskatchewan, and we feel very proud, not only of the constituents in Beechy, but of the entire Rosetown-Biggar riding.

They are people, people that know how to work hard. Mr. Speaker, they are people who care. I think that was shown by one of my constituent's presence here in the legislature yesterday. Carol Skelton, the grandmother from Harris, Saskatchewan, who is collecting letters from farm wives, from grandmothers, from young people who are living on the farm and telling their story about the farm crisis.

That's very indicative of the kind of people in the Rosetown-Biggar riding. People who not only work hard, people who take their politics seriously, but people who care about people, and people who care about Saskatchewan.

Rosetown-Biggar is a large and diverse constituency. Agriculture continues to be a driving force behind the economy, making the farm income crisis a very important issue in my constituency as well as the issues of health care, economic opportunity and taxation. And like many other constituencies, people of Rosetown-Biggar voted for real change.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, on September 16, 60 percent of the people of this province cast their votes against the government for someone else and they had good reasons for doing so. The highest taxes in the country, the worst health care in Canada, the worst highways by far, the longest welfare rolls, the worst job creation record.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the government says in its Speech from the Throne, we have changed our ways. Mr. Speaker, the government says we have learned our lesson, we will do better from now on. Well I hope that's the case Mr. Speaker. I hope this government does begin to do things better, things that are right for the province of Saskatchewan. But frankly, I'm doubtful.

Mr. Speaker, this government has had eight years. Eight years is a long time. Eight years to improve the lives of the people of our province. And by their own admission, they have been miserable failures.

Let's look on page 1 of the Speech from the Throne. They say, and I quote, "too many of our families in Saskatchewan are still having a hard time making ends meet."

Well why is that, Mr. Speaker? Is it because we pay nearly the highest taxes in the country? Is it because of ever increasing utility rates? Is it because of lack of opportunity in our province?

Mr. Speaker, they go on saying, and I quote again, "Too many

of our young people are concerned . . . about their futures.”

Why is that Mr. Speaker? Is it because the job creation rate in Alberta is nearly 30 times greater than it is here in Saskatchewan, Manitoba's job creation record 10 times better? In fact, Mr. Speaker, every province in Canada has a better record than ours.

Mr. Speaker, Prince Edward Island, Prince Edward Island, with just a fraction of the population — about 10 per cent of the population of our province — created 100 more jobs in the last 12 months as Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, young people are concerned about their futures but they're not stuck. Many young people are leaving Saskatchewan.

The Speech from the Throne goes on to say: “Too many of our rural families are a victim of a vicious trade war.” That's unfortunately true — sadly they are victims, and sadly they are stuck here in Saskatchewan. They are stuck with bills, banks and bad governments.

There's no arguing that rural Saskatchewan is in trouble, Mr. Speaker, except to say that it's not only rural Saskatchewan that is suffering. Yes, people in urban Saskatchewan have got to know that this will soon begin affecting their lives as well. The agriculture economy is simply too intertwined in all of our lives to believe that anyone is immune to such a massive countdown — downturn, pardon me — in the provincial economy.

(1445)

And I was speaking to the owner of a clothing store in Saskatoon a few weeks ago and this proprietor told me, “none of my farm customers are coming through the door anymore.” And this is a business in downtown Saskatoon. Don't let anyone tell you that this farm crisis is simply restricted to the farm or restricted to rural Saskatchewan. This farm crisis is affecting downtown Regina, downtown Saskatoon, and will spread beyond the borders of this province.

While it's good to see that the NDP is finally taking this issue seriously. Wouldn't it have been nice if they had started this process about a year ago? About the time the former minister of Agriculture declared that the income . . . farm income crisis was over?

The current Minister of Agriculture seems to following in Mr. Upshall's footsteps. He said that immediate support was needed yesterday; today he says well, we'll wait till March and see what's in the federal budget. I say shame on the Minister of Agriculture. Obviously that doesn't give me much confidence to believe the words in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne goes on to talk about people's worry in health care and the need to spend money wiser. It talked about the need to get our Aboriginal friends and neighbours more involved in the economy and back on track to self-sufficiency.

Nobody can disagree with these statements, Mr. Speaker. They are obvious. They were obvious to the voters. That's why they

make statements saying we will change our ways. I'm wondering: does anyone believe them? Can we believe them, coming from a government who has ignored all of these problems for eight years?

And finally, Mr. Speaker — and isn't this odd? — the Throne Speech talks about people's alienation from the political process. This coming from a Premier and a government who basically used — basically used — just about every trick in the book to overturn the results of this election.

Does the Premier realize that he is the problem? The people voted for a minority government but after behind-the-scene manipulations during this — to use his words — “the dead of night,” the people ended up with a majority NDP government again.

Now the Saskatchewan Party was committed to by eight MLAs on a sunny afternoon. I happened to be there and watched the proceedings. And nine of those MLAs that formed the Saskatchewan Party were re-elected with large pluralities. In contrast, after eight years of government, 60 per cent of the people of this province voted against the NDP. And yet there they remain, a majority, intact, thanks to the deal struck with three Liberal MLAs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't think of anything that would alienate voters more than this situation. The 20 per cent of the people who voted for the Liberal Party . . . in their own way were voting for change. The Liberal leader, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader in the televised leaders' debate, said that he wanted to provide a strong opposition to the NDP government. Some opposition — some opposition! Now those members sit among the same people who so angered the voters in the first place.

So now it's up to the Saskatchewan Party to speak out on behalf of those people and everyone else in Saskatchewan. People who have not liked how the NDP government has operated for the past eight years. They will not be fooled, Mr. Speaker, by the deathbed confession contained in the Throne Speech.

Mr. Speaker, for eight years this government has shown no commitment — no commitment in finding solutions for the problems that face this province. They've only looked around for someone else to blame — previous governments, the federal government, whoever, it didn't matter. It could have been Julius Caesar. If they could've traced a link back that far they'd have blamed Julius Caesar for their problems. Just as long as it got their government out from under any responsibility for the decisions that they've made as a government.

Well, as we saw in the election campaign, Mr. Speaker, the people said enough is enough, and began to hold the NDP accountable for their own record and ask for some solutions to the challenges facing Saskatchewan. And when that party could not come up with anything beyond their usual finger pointing, the people turned away from the NDP in droves. And I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Speech from the Throne will bring them back.

Now don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker, obviously much of this Throne Speech has been lifted directly from the election platform of the Saskatchewan Party. And if they actually

carried through on some of the ideas, Mr. Speaker, if they actually delivered on some of this Throne Speech, we would support that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, if they really mean what they say, they can prove it — they can prove that they mean what they say by supporting Bills and motions that we have introduced into this legislature. Some of those Bills were introduced this morning. Our problem however is we can't believe that they will offer that support.

Mr. Speaker, we will criticize the government, but we will also be constructive. We will do all we can to implement the platform that we ran on and won the popular vote on. But we simply don't believe that this government will be willing and have the determination, the humility, if I might add, to be able to carry through on the commitments that they have recognized from the Saskatchewan Party and included in their Speech from the Throne.

We don't believe this government believes in greater accountability. We don't believe them when they say they want to listen to the people of Saskatchewan more than they have in the past. We simply do not believe them, Mr. Speaker, because if they do mean these things, why would it have taken eight years and near extinction at the hands of the voters before they responded?

Mr. Speaker, the words contained in the Throne Speech are all well and good, but I don't believe the commitments made here will ever come to pass. They were promises made for political expediency, much like the deal they cooked up between the Premier and the current Minister of Education.

When you can't believe their words, Mr. Speaker, how can you support this Throne Speech. We believe this government is lacking in commitment to the people of this province. We believe this government will not make any major changes despite the election results.

And for that reason I move the following amendment, seconded by the member for Cypress Hills, that the following words be added to the end of the motion:

But regrets that the government has failed to make a firm commitment to provide meaningful tax relief to Saskatchewan residents; has not agreed to put in place a complete value-for-money audit of the deteriorating health care system; has not given any commitment to aid Saskatchewan farmers; and has not put forward a plan to improve Saskatchewan's deteriorating highways in the Speech from the Throne; and further regrets that while the provincial government acknowledges its failures over the past eight years, it appears the NDP government's deal with the three Liberal MLAs to form a coalition government was done to insure the NDP would not have to keep its promises in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of pride and humility that I stand and speak to the members of this venerable and cherished House on behalf of the people of Cypress Hills

constituency.

An initial speech is significant to both the person delivering it and to the persons, and people generally, on behalf of whom it's being presented. And for that reason, I struggled for many hours deliberating the issues and approaches that needed to be presented in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And even now, I'm not fully assured that I will accomplish what I . . . (inaudible) . . . intended.

My act of involvement with politics is a short story having begun less than two years ago. The events that have transpired in that time frame, however, have helped transform the political landscape of the province. And I am pleased with the small role that I, personally, have had to play.

I'm fully cognizant of the fact that no one achieves any meaningful success, though, without the help and support of many other people. And to that end, I would like to state publicly and for the record, that my wife and family have been that source of bedrock support in this effort.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — They have stood by me, they have encouraged me, and they have blessed me by their steadfast endorsement of my candidacy in a nomination race and two subsequent back-to-back elections, all in the space of less than 11 months.

In addition, I owe a great debt of gratitude to the people of Cypress Hills constituency. I have been blessed with their support. People, who like most of the province last year, knew little about this new political party I was promoting and knew even less about me.

Little by little, over a period of several months, I was able to see some of the scepticism lift from the countenance of jaded and untrusting voters. Now these were people who had put their faith in politicians before only to be disappointed in unbelievable measure by events and policies that followed. But the idea of a whole new, unsullied political entity, like the Saskatchewan Party, had a certain appeal. Sure, we were the new kids on the block and our policies were untested, but we were speaking the language of the common folk and they were ready to listen.

The June by-election, especially if you listen to the media, was the first real test of the Saskatchewan Party platform. Several pundits even went so far as to suggest that the party that won the election then in Cypress Hills could go on to form the official opposition, if not the government.

The people of Cypress Hills responded by soundly rejecting both of the Liberal and NDP platforms, giving us more than 50 per cent of the popular vote. They provided me with a personal honour by allowing me to become the first Saskatchewan Party candidate to be elected to this Assembly and to make history in the process.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Unfortunately, I was never allowed the privilege to sit in these chambers following that election. But what the Premier found so deathly afraid . . . or what he was so deathly afraid to do in the spring, he found the courage to do in the summer. He called a general election within a few short

weeks of our initial victory.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Cypress Hills constituency were truly and rightfully angered by the arrogance of that move. Bad enough that the people of the constituency had already decisively spoken and chosen their representative, only to have the Premier effectively overturn their choice. And it was bad enough that the government had wasted more than \$300,000 of taxpayers' money on by-elections, but the worst insult of all was calling an election right in the middle of harvest.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that backfired. Despite the Premier's best efforts, rural people did take time out from harvest to vote and, just as he had rightfully feared, rural Saskatchewan voted solidly to remove the NDP from office.

One thing about it though, it was very easy to campaign the second time around. There was no worry about how folks were going to vote — we just had to be sure to get them to the polls. Everyone in my constituency was upset with this government for one thing or another, and the outcome was never in question.

Besides the obvious timing of the election, there were other serious issues affecting the Cypress Hills constituency. We talked about those issues at length and offered real alternatives for their solution.

When you live as close to the Alberta and Montana borders as I do, and the rest of my constituency, you're ready to hear about significant tax reduction. We talked about that a lot. We talked about the effect of high rates of PST, sending consumers in great numbers and on a daily basis across the border to do their shopping. We talked about the impact taxation was having on small town businesses, the larger effect on community viability, and the resultant depopulation of the towns and countryside.

We talked about income tax and the fact that rates in Saskatchewan are significantly higher than our neighbour to the west. We talked about the fact that high rates of taxation are helping to export economic development, jobs, and people to other jurisdictions faster than anything this province has done to bring them in. And we talked about the young people, educated at our expense, only to lose them and their potential to other provinces — primarily Alberta.

We even talked about the loss of farm families who, because of the tax saving, decided to retire in Alberta and take three generations of accumulated wealth with them. And every so often we'd talk about farm families who weren't ready to retire yet, but they still moved to Medicine Hat and they just commuted to their Saskatchewan-based operation.

When it came to tax reduction, I didn't have to work hard to convince people of its necessity. In the Cypress Hills region, it was self-evident. The impact and reality of high tax policies on the part of the Government of Saskatchewan were everywhere to be seen and every person had their own story to tell.

Now while I was talking taxes with the people, what were the parties opposite saying? Well the candidate for the NDP was saying that things were pretty good as they were, and that the government was on the right track with its balanced approach

and all that.

And the Liberals were saying that taxation wasn't a factor and they couldn't find anyone who even thought it was. A sound thrashing at the hands of a disbelieving public in last June's by-election changed the minds behind both of those expressed points of view.

By general election time, the NDP and the Liberals had discovered tax relief as a key issue but neither party had any credibility in that area. And the end result was the narrowest of wins for the government, having snatched near defeat from the jaws of victory.

(1500)

Mr. Speaker, let's hope that the lessons learned in the near miss of last September will bring about real tax relief for the people of Cypress Hills and all of Saskatchewan. It is no longer an option but a necessity. We can no longer afford not to bring significant tax relief to this province if we hope to compete in any real way for new business opportunities, new projects in the area of economic development, new people and ideas or the energies they have to expend.

What else did I talk about with the people during the election campaign? I talked repeatedly about the disastrous state of our rural highways, and the unending erosion of health care services in the province as a whole. I talked about the debilitating effect of the current agricultural financial crisis.

Several times I was asked about the nurses' strike and the government's inept and divisive handling of that situation. Education funding and the impact it was having on property taxes, especially on farmland, received more than its fair share of attention. The list goes on to considerable length.

The bottom line for the people of Cypress Hills was that they wanted change and they wanted it badly. They saw a government that was tired of the battle, bereft of new ideas, and unopen to change. They saw the myriad of challenges, and the prospect of having someone new at the helm was both appealing and convincing. And the Saskatchewan Party was speaking their language, talking about their issues and concerns, and providing the best opportunity for change. The Saskatchewan Party became the party of the people — a populist party if you will, a party with a future.

Now that opportunity for change was stolen from the people of Cypress Hills by an unexpected change in circumstances. Another deal done more or less in the dead of the night. The coalition struck between a party in decline and another near extinction had the effect of undoing the express will of the people.

While a minority government may not have served the Premier well, it could have produced some of the best government this province has ever seen. The people were willing to live with the result. The powers that be were not. And it's as simple as that.

And so today we respond to a Throne Speech from a government that is just slightly more whole than the proverbial lame duck. On behalf of the people I represent, I sincerely hope

that we'll get more than duck soup out of this arrangement.

I want to state for the record, Mr. Speaker, that I have great respect for the Liberal candidate who ran in the Cypress Hills elections. He's truly an honourable gentleman and he conducted his campaigns accordingly. I also believe that had he been elected he wouldn't have been found sitting among the members opposite.

I seem to recall that in the 1986 general election, the NDP received more popular vote than the government of the day. The members opposite cried foul. They publicly decried the fact that a government could be elected when the majority of the voters had rejected its platform and vowed that such would never be the case if they were the government.

Well it's funny how things change, Mr. Speaker. In September when the overwhelming majority of voters decided that they wanted a new government, this government clings to power by any means available.

I would like to ask the Premier, his coalition partner, the Minister of Education, what answer should I give the person who asks me in the future why should I vote or what does it matter who you vote for? They're just going to do what they want anyway.

Arrangements such as the one crafted by the two of you do little to enhance the appeal of the democratic process. Instead they vote just a little more cynicism in an already jaded and apathetic populace, and for good reason. There's no sense decrying the image of politicians if by your very actions we're going to bring ourselves into disrepute. Respect for the voting public begins by putting their interests ahead of our own whether we're seeking or retaining power.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Cypress Hills constituency are as disappointed and put off by this turn of events as anyone. But the people, in true form, are willing to give you, Mr. Premier, and your government the benefit of the doubt. It's now time for you to perform — put up or get out of the way. We are a generous people but we don't take our generosity for granted. We wouldn't want you to do that either.

We are looking for real leadership at a time when issues are difficult and solutions require creativity. We're not prepared to accept anymore of the same, especially when we came within an ace of something different and more to our liking. And we're not prepared to sit back and take what's dished out if it's not in our best interests.

The people of Cypress Hills are honest, they're down to earth, they're hard-working people, and we have a history of heartiness and survival and a habit of holding people accountable for their actions. And maybe just as importantly, we have a long memory too.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the Premier said on election night he was listening, we were listening too. From now on we want to be shown.

In preparation for this speech, I reviewed the maiden speeches of most of my predecessors. Invariably the former MLAs spoke

about the great people of Cypress Hills, the tremendous open spaces, the unique natural features of the region, and the history that is so closely tied to the opening of the West. All of these facets are still of significance, but there is one thing that begs for recognition as I conclude my remarks here today.

Except for the two ridings in the Far North, the Cypress Hills constituency is the largest and most sparsely populated region of the province. A large riding in area, a small population, and a great distance from Regina, which is the apparent seat of all wisdom west of Toronto, those factors have conspired to make us feel under-represented and ignored in the larger scheme of things.

To underscore my point, Mr. Speaker, let me illustrate by saying this. We have approximately one voter for every square mile in the constituency of Cypress Hills. We have provided literally hundreds of millions of dollars in oil royalties and revenue over the past several years, yet we suffer from some of the worst roads and health care infrastructure in the province. We are losing population numbers daily to the economic magnet of Alberta, yet the provincial government policies with regard to taxation seem impervious to the problem.

The impact of successive NDP governments on rural Saskatchewan, and the southwest in particular, has had a particularly debilitating effect. Our towns are dying, our farms are struggling, and our people are leaving. Only hardiest of people and communities will survive the continued ignoring handed to us by this government.

We're not prepared to take it anymore. We want our due, we want our attention. We want your attention and we want it now. We want to be heard, we want to be taken seriously, and we intend to start that process today. With this speech the people of Cypress Hills constituency have served notice.

It's my great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to second the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member from Rosetown-Biggar. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride and humility I rise in these chambers today as the MLA for Saskatoon Northwest to deliver the Liberal Party reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I would like to congratulate all members, new and returning, on their election this past September. It is no easy feat to win the support of your constituents. It requires hard work, dedication, and the faith of your convictions to put yourself under public scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand before you as the representative of Saskatoon Northwest, a constituency I am proud to call home. A constituency whose boundaries include major businesses, independent businesses, schools, working men and women, and amenities which nourish not only the body but also the spirit.

Saskatoon Northwest is a diverse constituency consisting primarily of two suburbs — Lawson Heights and Silverwood —

that I have had the privilege of living in both of these areas.

The constituency is served by a variety of schools, including Marian Graham Collegiate and Bishop Mahoney High School.

An Hon. Member: — Very good schools.

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — Very good schools. The constituency is close to the downtown core and the airport, and the vitality of the constituency is evident in its community spirit and the number of active community groups.

The constituency is bordered by the South Saskatchewan River, the Silverwood Golf Course, and the Saskatoon North Industrial park. Harvey and Umea parks are centres of community activities, and you can follow the South Saskatchewan River along the Meewasin Trail to reach the downtown core.

The Saskatoon Henk Ruys Soccer Centre has been the hub of social and athletic activity in this constituency over the last two years. It provides excellent opportunities for young people, which we saw last weekend with a soccer tournament, the under-15 boys, including a game where a team my son played on played a team from Brandon. And every weekend there was a soccer tournament that brings teams from all over western Canada.

The commercial vitality of the constituency has been amazing with manufacturing, lumber, high technology, commercial and retail development. The hub of the retail sector is the Lawson Heights Mall which has not had a vacant space in close to four years.

The Saskatoon chemical plant is also located in the constituency and the rural polls in the constituency are home to various niche farm businesses along valley road, which show the vitality of this area.

Mr. Speaker, I must admit to not just being a proud representative of Saskatoon Northwest, but I also have roots right here in Regina. My father, Samuel Melnychuk, was raised on a farm near Dysart and returned to farming after serving overseas in France, Holland, and Germany in the Second World War.

My mother, Elizabeth Melnychuk, nee Toth, was raised on a farm near Lestock where she met my father. They married shortly thereafter and moved to Regina where I was raised and where my father began a long career as a federal public employee in the Department of National Defence.

My mother ran a rooming house while staying at home to raise their eight children, and together my parents instilled in us the importance of education and the independence we needed to grow as individuals. All of my brothers and sisters have taken post-secondary education and have collectively received 15 degrees and diplomas in the sciences, arts, education, administration, and medicine.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — I am proud to have graduated from Campion high school right here in Regina and attended the

University of Regina in Campion College where I completed degrees in biology and psychology.

I went on to medical school at the University of Saskatchewan and received my MD (Doctor of Medicine).

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — I went into private medical practice where I had a special interest in obstetrics, pediatrics, and long-term care, and have delivered over a thousand babies right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

I was elected to the representative assembly of the Saskatchewan Medical Association and was elected to their board of directors in 1991. I then served as the treasurer, vice-president, and chaired the board as president in 1994-95.

During this time I helped to negotiate the framework agreement with the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations and the provincial government that allows for bi-level bargaining on wages and working conditions, and also chaired the committees on long-term care and health system regionalization — areas of keen interest to me.

So what would prompt me to give up a medical practice to enter politics? I've thought about this a lot over the last three years. The answer is the same now as it was then. As a doctor and having been raised in the province of Saskatchewan, I care about our health care system and have worked to improve it both outside and inside of politics. Watching my children grow up, I care about making sure that they and all Saskatchewan students get the best possible education so they can make their way in this world and contribute to our society.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my family, which is the backbone and strength of any politician, starting with my wife, Donna; my daughter, Jennifer, who is in her second year arts and science at the University of Saskatchewan; my sons David and Jared who are in grade 11 and grade 9 at Bishop Mahoney High School and who are active in soccer, computers, and Nintendo, and often need to be prompted to do their homework.

This Throne Speech reflects this coalition government's goal of listening to Saskatchewan people and acting on their concerns. This speech reflects many of the concerns that we, as Saskatchewan Liberals, identified during the election campaign and now have an opportunity to implement in this coalition government.

In the area of education our commitment to improve financial accessibility for post-secondary education has been heard and will be acted on. Saskatchewan's post-secondary students will get the help they need to get the education they need and, in the process, make this province more competitive on the world stage.

(1515)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — In addition, our commitment to have the provincial government assume greater direct responsibility

for financing education K to 12 has been heard and will be acted on. With our coalition government delivering more provincial education funding, this will allow school boards to give all property owners an opportunity to have their education property taxes reduced and help to reduce the burden on farmers facing a high tax bill that adds to their input costs.

In health, our commitment to regional hospitals has been heard and we will reduce waiting lists in Regina and Saskatoon, improve health care in rural Saskatchewan with our ongoing commitment to less administration and more support for front line health care workers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — In addition, our joint commitment to expanded funding for home care has been heard and will be acted on. We have highlighted our commitment to agriculture. We have had Saskatchewan representation at the World Trade Organization talks. We are delivering on our promise to get money into the hands of farmers as quickly as possible through the redirection of provincial AIDA funds characterized in our platform.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — We are working together hard — all parties in this Assembly — to get our federal government to deal with export enhancements for Saskatchewan farmers.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — We promised and we will pursue our commitment for long-term income stabilization for our farmers, the third-line of defence.

Saskatchewan Liberals have talked about, and now we're in a position to deliver on our promise to help reduce input costs for farmers, to make it easier for them to stay on the land they love and where they belong.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of dealing with agriculture cannot be overstated for all of Saskatchewan. Especially after the farm delegation returned from Ottawa, there has been growing talk of western separation. Separatism always stems from alienation; the feeling that the central government is insensitive to the feelings of those located far from the central power. The manner how the federal government has treated the farm delegation has added to the sense of alienation that exists in Western Canada.

Western alienation is not new. It has existed since Confederation. If you look back at things like the Riel Rebellion or the feelings towards railways in their treatment of farmers. In the last 30 years the federal government has drawn fire for how it has treated western farmers with the national energy program and how it seems western votes count for little in federal elections. The best way to deal with alienation and separatism is not just to listen to western concerns but to act on them.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — The federal government must listen

and must act on western concerns. I'm a federalist. I believe we have a national government which is supposed to listen to the concerns of everyone in this country, not just those areas which have elected government MPs (Member of Parliament). Let's not forget that other parts of this country share the same frustrations as we do at various times. The Maritimes feel that they are not being heard by the federal government. British Columbia has always felt cut off from the rest of Canada. The North, including the Yukon, the Northwest and Nunavut territories feel excluded from having any meaningful say or input into major decisions which affect them. And let's not forget Quebec which has used these feelings of alienation to negotiate for a greater say in various areas of jurisdiction.

However, will the threat of western separatism really solve anything? Looking at the bottom line, we need to keep more of our people in western Canada, providing them with opportunities instead of watching them move to either the United States, Ontario, or anywhere but here. It is interesting to me that Canadians share a bond of feeling alienated from central power, but a national government, a provincial government, or a municipal government must work to address these feelings.

If we share other values, but it seems to me if we listen to each other, work on what we have in common, and fully develop our own potential, then the alienation we feel today will start to ebb away tomorrow and we'll have a true federation that works.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — The Throne Speech has addressed issues with regard to taxation, and when it comes to issues such as taxes, Liberals have always believed in a theme of tax fairness. We will have tax relief over the next four years that will benefit all people, not just the rich.

We will deliver on our Liberal commitment to provide for more funding to school boards to help them reduce property taxes. We will deliver on our commitment to continue paying down our debt — our joint commitment. And we will deliver on our commitment — our joint commitment — to continue giving the people of Saskatchewan the balanced budgets they demand as proof of our fiscal responsibility.

Saskatchewan Liberals have long called for open and accountable government, and this coalition government is in a position to deliver on these promises. Our commitment to a permanent body to review utility rates has been delivered and is in the process of being implemented.

The Liberal commitment to deal with the sexual abuse of children has been heard. I'm especially proud to see this initiative since it was initially brought up and discussed in the Liberal caucus before going public. I'm also pleased to see the Saskatchewan Party has seen the wisdom of our stand and adopted it as their policy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melnychuk: — There are many who wondered if this coalition government might be just smoke and mirrors or if it would be a real change for Saskatchewan people. We have seen

this week the start of real change for the people of Saskatchewan — a brand new day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — And the proof that we can work together in a true partnership to make this great province even better and maintain Saskatchewan as a place where political innovation works to the betterment of all Saskatchewan people.

I'm happy to see the Leader of the Opposition support the idea of coalition governments. The 1997 electoral reform task force report by the Reform Party noted coalition governments provide stability and ensure . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — I see that the part that I'm about to quote may have been thrown away by the opposition leader, but I quote:

Continuity of public policy and policy based not on short-term political gain, but on long-term public good.

Your quote.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Melenchuk: — I'm happy to see the Leader of the Opposition saw the sensibility of a coalition government back then as opposed to, and I quote again from the Reform Party report:

Extremism, wild swings in policy, and abuse of political power is more likely when power is concentrated in the hands of the few rather than in the hands of the many.

Mr. Speaker, as Leader of the Liberal Party, I am happy to endorse the Throne Speech. We are in this coalition for the people of Saskatchewan and this Throne Speech shows Saskatchewan people a government that doesn't just listen to one portion of the population but is genuinely interested in listening to what all people have to say and using what Saskatchewan people have to say to give them the government they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the Throne Speech and I will not be supporting the Tories-in-disguise amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order please.

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues who have been in this place before I arrived, they informed me that when we give our maiden speech the convention of the House is that we're not heckled. However, I fear that my colleagues may have perhaps taken that privilege away from me with their actions of the last speaker. Nonetheless, this of course is my maiden speech in the Assembly and the privilege of the occasion has not escaped me, Mr. Speaker.

I can recall wondering how it would feel on election night should I be successful in the campaign. To say the experience of receiving a majority of the support of my neighbours and family and friends was overwhelming would be an understatement.

I enjoyed the campaign, Mr. Speaker. We worked hard but we also tried to have a little fun. The first night of the election I helped put up some lawn signs. And, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that throughout that four-week campaign we put up a lot of lawn signs.

My job that first night was to fasten the signs with the help of a cordless drill. I also knocked on the doors of the supporters when we went to the homes who wanted a sign to let them know that we were there. And I can recall after ringing the doorbell at one home and hearing the people inside, I was wondering why they wouldn't answer the door. I could even see them through the screen door, Mr. Speaker, but they wouldn't answer.

The next day my campaign manager got a call from those same supporters advising him that should I do that sort of campaigning again I should refrain from brandishing the cordless drill on the steps of the homes. Evidently they were convinced that someone was on their front step with a gun, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to tell that story with Liberals in the House. And although I lack the political experience here to differentiate between the Liberals and NDP members on the government side of the House, I have been assured by my veteran colleagues that they are sitting over there, to be sure. And so I tell this story with trepidation because if too many Liberals hear this story, Mr. Speaker, we may all soon be forced to register our cordless drills in Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the events of September 16 represent the fulfillment of one of my long-standing hopes and aspirations. Politics has been a burning interest of mine for an admittedly disturbingly long period of time. Indeed my first recollection of wanting to represent my home community in a democratic institution of some sort stretches back to grade 6.

To fully understand just how long I have thought seriously about the honour of the duties that I now have, Mr. Speaker, consider that when I was in grade 6 first harbouring these thoughts, Ron Lancaster was still the quarterback for the Riders; Elvis was still alive, although apparently just barely; the provincial government of the day had not yet nationalized everything with a financial statement and a heartbeat; and the Premier himself was a relative rookie MLA of only nine years experience.

And even despite the plummeting popularity of politicians in general since that time, Mr. Speaker, I have been just warped enough to never waiver in this personal desire to fulfill these goals. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that I firmly believe that this is truly an honourable calling, and a wonderful opportunity to contribute in some small way to the community that has given me and my family so much.

And I am comforted by the fact that the popularity of the profession has maybe not changed that much over the decades after all. In fact when Abraham Lincoln was asked about his thoughts on public office, he likened it to being tarred, feathered, and run out of town on a rail. He said, if it wasn't for the honour of the thing, I'd just as soon walk.

(1530)

But, Mr. Speaker, if you know Swift Current and the immediate area, it is not hard to understand why I feel so honoured regarding my new role. My own bias notwithstanding, I believe Swift Current and indeed southwest Saskatchewan have been constant sources of innovation, ideas, pioneering thought for the province and in many instances for the entire country.

Our agriculture research station has developed countless cereal breeds now in use across the prairies and around the world. Swift Current is the home of Saskatchewan's first real foray into the energy sector, home of Fosterton No. 1, one of the first rigs drilled in the province just outside of the city.

It is the cradle of medicare, Mr. Speaker, the home of health region no. 1. It is the smallest city in Canada to have a major junior hockey franchise, the mighty Swift Current Broncos.

Three years ago Swift Current became home to yet another grassroots-driven experiment that established the province's first centre for entrepreneurial development. It has already received provincial and national attention and it is serving as a model for similar centres in other locations in the province and across Canada.

And only two and a half months ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the constituency of Swift Current claimed another first that I am sure will also be copied in the cities of our province — it sent the first of many urban Saskatchewan Party MLAs to this legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Behind all of these attributes and history, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are the people of Swift Current and district. To their indomitable spirit, Swift Current owes all of its achievements and all of its prosperity. It was that spirit and more than a little sweat and individual initiative that allowed them to bravely ignore the advice of the explorer, Mr. John Palliser, who warned in the mid-19th century that no one should even attempt to farm in the Swift Current area, much less build a community and a life there.

Mr. Speaker, not only did we ignore Mr. Palliser, but we actually named buildings and community centres after the man that said we were crazy to live there — the Palliser Regional Care Centre, and the Palliser Pavilion.

Mr. Speaker, there are countless examples of Swift Current and district people whose life stories could eloquently and more than sufficiently illustrate my point. I should like to share one of those this afternoon. It's the story of a Swift Current couple.

They were born and raised not far from each other, one on a farm just 1 mile south of the city limits, the other in Rhineland,

also in my constituency — a small town 20 minutes south of Swift Current.

She was raised on a farm. Her father never owned an inch of the land he worked most of his life, but somehow through hard work, some beef cattle, a milker, some pigs, a pen full of chickens, and a garden of biblical proportion, her folks raised five kids and built a life.

His father was a preacher and a farmer and an inventor and an entrepreneur. And his father taught him very simple and basic life truths — hard work, honesty, integrity, the power of prayer, and of amazing grace.

The two fell in love; they were married, both in their teens. They raised two boys and passed on the same values they'd been taught. And he started his first business, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with his brothers when he was 16.

He had a lot of dreams and a lot less money, but his entrepreneurial spirit and his belief in hard work and the free enterprise system were his foundation. And on that foundation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a life was built. On that foundation, food and shelter for the family were provided. On that foundation, Mr. Speaker, jobs were created for others and their families. On that foundation, tithes were brought and charity was provided. On that foundation, their children were educated. And yes, on that foundation taxes were paid.

All along she supported him. She raised two sons and took a job to help with the bills. She continued her own pursuit of education, and through diligence and hard work progressed in her own career and in the start-up of her own business.

Mr. Speaker, these two people were my parents, Alice and John Wall.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — They typify the kind of people I now have the great privilege of representing. I owe them most everything I count as a blessing today, and it's my abiding hope that I can be to my children what they've been to me.

Mr. Speaker, it's an unqualified honour to be a part of this team that makes up this side of the House, for you see I believe that the men and women who constitute the official opposition have a long-term vision and a dream for the province that will fortify the entrepreneurial free enterprise foundation my father used to realize his own dreams and that those of us who follow need to build ours.

Unfortunately we on this side of the aisle, and a growing majority of Saskatchewan people, fear that this foundation has been crumbling of late, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been shaken at its forms by a centrist, paternalistic approach to government. It is cracking under the weight of big government. It lacks that entrepreneurial vision. It is sagging under the weight of the second highest taxes in the Dominion.

Oh, but there is good news, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact the good news started to be broadcast around the province at about 9 p.m. on September 16, but strangely enough it wasn't

broadcast by our provincial media. They were so busy telling the same old story, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they almost missed the rest of the story.

No, this good news story was methodically broadcast by no less an authority than the voters of the province of Saskatchewan. Slowly, gradually, village by village, town by town, RM (rural municipality) by RM, and yes, city by city, they sent their positive message until the din from the country became a roar in the city and in the ears of the pundits and the media experts.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — They sent their good news message that boldly affirmed that we could cut taxes for Saskatchewan families; that we could get out of the way of our small-business people and let them create jobs and grow our economy; that we could and should review our health care system, district by district; to spend valuable health care dollars more wisely with patients, not administration and health care politics as the number one priority.

They sent a message that goat trails will never pass for highways in our province; that our social assistance system desperately needs reform to restore the dignity of work to Saskatchewan men and women who clearly want to work.

And, Mr. Speaker, they sent a message of good news that said we can have a different style of politics in our province. A different style of politics including a new political party that is the only one in the province with the courage to give its members a free vote in this place, so that we are free to represent our constituents and not simply toe the party line. A different style of politics that would introduce set elections in our province so that never again could a premier play games with the calling of an election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, their message took form on the evening of September 16 in the persons of 25 men and women elected under the banner of the Saskatchewan Party. I am very proud to be part of that number, Mr. Speaker, and very encouraged by the fact that this group of men and women, led by the Leader of the Official Opposition, have a long-term vision for our province.

That vision includes lower taxes and better health care, improved highways, and a long-term safety net for our farmers. It is a vision that calls for us to place a higher priority on providing a place to work and live for our young people when they graduate.

Too many of my friends live in Alberta, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I don't care much that e-mail allows me cheap and easy contact with them. I would like them to be here, raising their families here, enrolling their kids in our schools, paying taxes — lower taxes, mind you — but taxes to our treasury nonetheless.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, the recent election proved that we

are so close to realizing the opportunity to implement that vision, and I'm speaking of course of the next general election in the province of Saskatchewan. In the meantime, there is no reason we cannot start preparing for that day now.

That is why the official opposition has seemingly been the source — the only source — of new ideas before and certainly since the provincial election. And apparently going against its own character, the government has recognized some of those good ideas when they've seen them as was evidenced by at least parts of the Throne Speech, proving once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that even a blind squirrel finds a nut every now and then.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — They seem to have taken some pages from our book. And while the proof will be in their implementation, we don't mind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in elementary school we can all remember that there were good students and sometimes there were those students who simply didn't have the answers or who were unwilling to do the work. We were told by our teachers to not let other classmates peer over our shoulders for the answers, to cover our work and not let them see.

But we on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are breaking with those time-honoured admonishments. Maybe we feel sorry for our slower classmates in the place or maybe . . . who are maybe unwilling to do the work or, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who maybe just don't get the question. We are prepared to let them copy from our homework, Mr. Speaker, in the interests of our province and of our constituents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I look forward with great anticipation to representing my constituents in this legislature and to working with such a dynamic and idea-generating group of people that sits to your left hand.

I also want to thank my wife Tami for her amazing support and inspiration which I pledge never to take for granted. Despite the newness of the role and the unknown of its future demands on me, my number one priority will remain with Tami and our children, Megan, Colter, and Faith.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wall: — Mr. Speaker, my commitment to my constituents is solemn. I will employ the values that have been instilled in me while I grew up in Swift Current. Honesty, integrity, hard work, family, faith, common sense, and hopefully a sense of humour, will be the values I strive for in representing the constituency of Swift Current.

To a large extent I'll be able to draw on my own heritage to help me remember those values. I can conclude with a true story of my father's father to help underscore the point.

Well into his senior years my grandpa, Peter Wall, drove downtown one day to pick up some things he needed at a store. I'm sure he was working on some carpentry project in his shop.

He parked his car and plugged the meter and headed for the store. And when he returned he noticed his meter had expired.

He got in his car, drove straight to city hall, and stood in line at the cashier's wicket. And when he got to the cashier he asked how much he had to pay. They asked to see his ticket and he said he didn't get a ticket. And so they said, well in that case you're free to go. You don't have to pay. But he insisted on paying. He believed he had broken the law and his sense of pure honesty told him he needed to admit to his violation and pay the fine.

If I could somehow practise my grandpa's sense of right and wrong, of honesty and basic human goodness, I know I will have at least a slim chance of doing a justice to the great honour that the people of Swift Current and Wymark and Rhineland and Blumenhof and Stewart Valley have given to me. I'll be supporting the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like leave to introduce guests before I begin my remarks.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Wartman: — We'll get this system down yet. I would like to introduce my wife Gail who is seated in the gallery opposite. Gail has been a tremendous support throughout the years that we have spent together, and I'm thankful for that support and for the relationship and the wonderful children that we have — Alaina, who is in grade 12 at Winston Knoll Collegiate here in the city; and son Daniel, who is in grade 10 and just got his learner's licence.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Addley, and the proposed amendment thereto moved by Mr. Hermanson.

Mr. Wartman: — It is with a sense of awe that I stand in this Chamber to respond to the Speech from the Throne. So much of great historical significance has taken place in this Chamber. So many of this province's great leaders have brought their hopes, their visions, and their dreams to this place. Working together with other committed women and men, they have turned those hopes and dreams and visions into reality. Medicare was bought to birth in this place. It took incredible vision, courage, to develop that system which has since been adopted by the whole nation.

Child poverty and the number of people needing social welfare have been reduced because people with a commitment to compassionate social justice work together here to make it happen.

Workplaces are safer because people who cared made sure that there was good occupational health and safety legislation.

And, Mr. Speaker, despite the economic ravages wrecked upon this province by the former Tory government, our Premier, a leader with strength, courage and wisdom, along with a team of deeply committed colleagues, led us safely through the valley of the shadow of death. They took us back from the edge of disaster by balancing the budget. Not only did they put the province back on safer ground by balancing the budget, they have continued to successfully work for the good of this province in the areas of economic development and social justice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1545)

Mr. Wartman: — Because of their hard work, we now have a province with a more widely diversified economic base. That broad, diversified economic base has helped and will continue to help carry us through times like these when one sector of the economy is hurting so deeply.

New and innovative developments like the Synchrotron in Saskatoon and the petroleum technology research centre here in Regina and new operations like Farm-Gro, just outside the city, have helped give us hope for a truly bright future for this province. Still, we have much to do and the Throne Speech sets before us a vision and a goal towards which we will work with courage and with commitment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel deeply honoured by the fact that the people of Regina Qu'Appelle Valley elected me to be their MLA. I have lived and served in the northwest of this city for many years, though in a slightly different capacity.

I have appreciated the work of my predecessors, Suzanne Murray, who is always such a bright and compassionate person, and John Solomon, who continues to work hard as a Member of Parliament for the Regina Lumsden constituency and for this nation. Both John and Suzanne served with diligence and with care for many years. I hope to build upon their work.

Regina Qu'Appelle Valley is a real bridging constituency. It is a wonderful mix of urban and rural, residential, agricultural, and industrial. Within the constituency are a significant number of this region's major industries, including one of our largest employers, IPSCO.

Regina Qu'Appelle Valley covers much of northwest Regina. It stretches from No. 1 Highway just east of the city, north to the south side of the Qu'Appelle Valley. It follows that scenic valley over to the junction of the Regina Beach road and the Lumsden Beach road and then heads straight south between Pense and Grand Coulee, and it includes the communities of Grand Coulee and the beautiful town of Lumsden.

I am deeply honoured to serve Regina Qu'Appelle Valley. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Throne Speech spoke of our government's commitment to do everything within our power and within our means to support the farmers of this province. The farmers of Saskatchewan are, for the most part, in desperate circumstances caused by factors far beyond their control.

The federal government has undermined the economy of prairie grain farmers. Over a period of years, they have arbitrarily cut back on programs that were vital to a successful agricultural economy on the prairies. They removed the Crow rate, an agreement that was to have been in place for perpetuity. Despite their words, they have not made the railroads operate fairly. They have not placed caps on profits for hauling grain nor have they made the railroads share their excess profits equitably.

The farmers of Saskatchewan deserve this treatment — a better treatment. The primary producers of this province should not be treated with such disdain by our federal government. While railroad companies have prospered, farmers have continued to suffer financial setbacks.

On top of that, in some misguided attempt at righteousness in trade issues, the federal government unilaterally reduced subsidies on export grains. This action has given the farmers of the US and the European Union an incredible advantage, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can our farmers be expected to survive and make a decent living with a staggering 30 per cent trade differential?

How can any safety net cover that kind of loss? It is certainly beyond the means of any provincial government, especially one whose taxpayers are feeling the squeeze caused by the economic shortfall in agriculture. Still I am proud of our government's work on the agricultural issue today. And I am inspired when I hear the tone of the Throne Speech on issues important to farmers, indeed to all the people of this province.

From the very beginning of the discussions on support for Saskatchewan farmers, our former minister of Agriculture, Eric Upshall, pushed the federal government. He told them repeatedly that AIDA would not work for western grain farmers. Indeed in the end, our government only signed onto AIDA under great duress, including pressure from our colleagues in the official opposition.

I am proud of the fact that this government has heard the voice of the people — yes, including the voice of our friends in the official opposition — calling for a delegation to Ottawa and calling for an open meeting such as we had in this Chamber yesterday where farm groups could come, tell their story, and tell us what they hoped might happen for them. And I am proud of the actions that we have taken so far.

Despite the fact that we have not yet got Ottawa to make the minimum \$1 billion trade equalization payment, the delegation was a courageous and in some ways successful intervention. Despite all the differences, members of the delegation stayed focused on a clear need for a \$1 billion trade equalization payment. And they spoke with a consistent and a clear voice.

Giving credit where credit is due, I must say that along with our own members and with the other representatives from

agricultural communities from SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), along with these others, the Leader of the Official Opposition and the member from Kindersley spoke very well and gave clear challenges to the federal government to live up to its responsibility.

It was an honour and an inspiration to be a part of the delegation called together and led so ably by our Premier and by our Minister of Agriculture. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve our beloved province.

As I listened to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor read this visionary Throne Speech, I found myself saying yes — yes, I think we can do this. Though our accumulated debt is staggering, and our resources are severely taxed — no pun intended — we will over the course of these next four years scale this mountain and reach these visionary goals. We will do it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — We will. We will work our way through this agricultural crisis. We will make our health care system the most effective and efficient system that is possible. We will decrease the tax burden and make the system more fair for all people. One-income families will no longer be penalized and there will be relief for the poor. The tax burden will be shared as equitably as possible. And we will build this province.

Working together with our communities, with school boards, with teachers, post-secondary institutions, First Nations and Metis peoples, we will develop and implement plans to provide the best, most accessible education possible in order to prepare all Saskatchewan's people for the future.

Working together with stakeholders, we will continue to build and diversify the economy so all our children will have the possibility of good jobs and a prosperous future right here in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wartman: — Am I dreaming? Am I dreaming?

An Hon. Member: — No.

Mr. Wartman: — Yes, yes, I am. I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming of how wonderful this province will be. I'm dreaming of how wonderful it will be. Our future is built on the hopes and the visions and the dreams of today. I think we can; I think we can; I think we can.

Working together with commitment, courage, and compassion, we will climb the mountain of today; we will make this visionary Throne Speech a reality; and we will roll into the future with joy and celebration. Am I dreaming?

An Hon. Member: — Yes.

Mr. Wartman: — Yes, you bet I am. And together we will make this dream a reality. Together we'll make it a reality. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's good to be back again. Not long ago we had an election and I guess when we go into an election all of us kind of wonder how it's going to turn out.

On this one I think there were quite a number of us, at least 25, that didn't have that much of a concern how it was going to turn out. We had a fairly good feeling for what was going on in our constituencies.

We knew what the people of the province were thinking. The media didn't. The people across the floor didn't, but the rest of us, we knew what they were thinking. And it showed up as the election progressed. When you would see signs out there that were usually up, no signs were there. You couldn't get people to debate the issues; they were out somewhere hiding. And anyways, it was just an excellent, an excellent time out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we rolled through that election. And the results were much better than what we had hoped — much better than we had hoped. We knew it would be good, but to go ahead and win more public support than any other party in Saskatchewan, and that being our first election as a full party, was exceptional and it was exciting.

And there are a few people I need to thank. And I guess as most people that have been elected to this House realize, that the groups that sacrifice the most are your families. Because you expect them to help you, and they do. You expect them to come out to some of the rallies, and they do. You expect them to put out some signs, and they do. And then you're gone for awhile to Regina and you're gone to all sorts of meetings and they have to do without you. And for most of us, they wish we were home. And for my family as well, I have to express sincere gratitude on my part for the support that they've given.

And there's an individual that I thanked the first time I was elected. And it sounded rather odd because we make a lot of jokes about our mother-in-laws — mothers-in-law. I have to get that right or I'll be corrected when I get home.

And I have to do the same for my mother-in-law because she's a big support in my life. Last time when I mentioned her in my speech, it got stuck to the fridge and I think it's still there. So she can remove that one after four years and put the new one on there.

But I do want to thank her for her support, for her prayers; they're always there. I keep getting cards from her, and phone calls. And it's that kind of support I think that each one of us has from our families and it means so very much to us.

The election was interesting, as I said. The government, as our leader has expressed, had a very near-death experience — a very near-death experience. In fact it must have come as much of a shock because I'm sure they listened to the media declaring the victories out there, landslides pretty well, and then to wake up a few minutes or an hour or two later to find out it wasn't that way. That victory we thought would be so strong and so solid was not there.

The phrase that was used very often before the election and during and election and after, was that the NDP had become arrogant. And I think the public realized that, and they're still realizing it. There was a moment or two, just a moment or two after the election where we heard the Premier say something about he might have to listen. Maybe there was a lesson to be taught. I don't think that he learned the lesson but it was there to be taught.

(1600)

If we look at the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a phrase that has been brought to your attention numbers of times but I think it needs to be done again. We often talk about four-letter words, but there's a three-letter word in this one which is repeated many times. And I'm really rather surprised that it would show up in the NDP Speech from the Throne.

The three-letter word is "too". Because too many of our families in Saskatchewan are still having a hard time making ends meet, and don't we all know it. And why do they find that hard at times to make ends meet? Well probably the key one is taxes, because the money that each one of us has to spend are after tax dollars. And we seem to have a few of those around, very few, and that's because the tax takes too many of those dollars away from us. Too many of our families in Saskatchewan are still having a hard time making ends meet.

It's interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's written after the NDP had eight years to change things, eight years, and this document is full of the "toos". Too many of our young people still concerned about their futures. Not only concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about their futures, but concerned where those futures are going to be because too many of our young people know that their futures are not going to be in Saskatchewan.

Each one of us as MLAs in this House, regardless what our political stripe is, are proud of Saskatchewan. We love Saskatchewan. It means a lot to us.

I love this province. It has a beauty that you can't find any other place. Yes, maybe you have to learn to understand the beauty of vast spaces and some of the things that we have. But it is there, and I love it.

But our young people love it as well, but they're not sure if they'll be able to stay here. And they leave this province in droves. They must be leaving in droves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because why are your population still very nearly what it was in the 1930s?

It's not that we don't have prolific people in this province, but they leave one after another — dozens, busloads, trainloads leaving this particular province. They must, because our population doesn't seem to grow.

Another too. Too many of our rural families are victims of a vicious trade war, and I'll say a bit more about that later on. And the fact is I would say there are really no rural families that are not victims, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of that vicious trade war. And as this is progressing and the situation getting more serious, it's moving into our towns and into our cities where

businesses and employees and jobs are being lost and lessened because of what's happening in this province.

Not only do we have one page full of too's, we turn the page and it continues, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Too many seniors and too many families are still worried that our health care system will not be there when they need it, and I'll say something more about that.

We had in question period today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a situation that was mentioned, and I think what was frightening there was the fact that the dollars that are being put into our health care are being so badly misused. A situation where we spent close to a quarter million dollars of health care money for something we could have done for between 30 and \$40,000, had the people had the care given to them here in Saskatchewan instead of going across the border and having some Americans make some money on our sick people.

Not only that, but we could have had that equipment left here to be used by other people needing the same care, and it wouldn't have cost any more in labour, any more people to operate that. It could have been there. We could have saved, as I said, hundreds of thousands of dollars on one person's situation, but this government decided to squander that money as they've squandered so much money.

Yes, you could probably solve health care by just throwing more money into it. But when you got a bucket with a hole in it, how much water do you have to keep pouring in before you're gaining instead of losing? This NDP government is not prepared to check for the holes in the bucket, and this province doesn't have enough money to keep pouring enough into the top of it. And that's the problem. That's the problem, Mr. Speaker.

The Saskatchewan Party, during the election, made a commitment. It wasn't a flashy commitment, but it was a solid commitment. A commitment that the people of this province understood even though the people across the floor over here didn't seem to understand it. That commitment was that we were going to do an audit of the health care system and find out if there were holes in the bucket. And from time to time where we've used that example people have sort of sat back and said: well, really? This morning in question period, one individual; we saw the big hole in the bucket the NDP system has. And they weren't prepared to fix it. All they said is, don't hold your breath.

Well people of Saskatchewan we'll have to hold our breath a little longer, but after the next election that group will not be sitting on that side. And we will be able to fix some of that health care by fixing the holes that are in that bucket. Then when we put some dollars into the top of it, they'll have some effect for the people that are looking for health care in this province.

Continuing, too many citizens alienated from our province's public life. It says the doors of the legislature are to be opened and their voices are to be heard within. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we did something very unusual yesterday when we had people from rural Saskatchewan come in and state their situations. And that was an exciting time I think for this House,

for MLAs of all stripes, and for the people who were watching. Just to see that the ordinary people, the people who operate our farms, the farm families could come in, talk to us directly, instead of as so often the case where we're being accused of being the ones that talk to them. However the statement still is, too many citizens alienated from the province's public life.

There's a commitment that I made during this election to the people of my constituency, that I made in the previous election, and if I'm around for the next election — and I hope to be — I'll make the same commitment. And they seem to appreciate it. And that is, that on issues in this House I will vote on my conscience first; and I'm fortunate enough to have a small enough constituency physically that the people know us. And I said next we'll take into consideration the wishes of the constituency and then we'll move on to the party politics.

And the people of my constituency want to know that when I come here, that it's this individual they elected that is voting on the issues based on the what the people of that constituency want, and they support me for that. And I think that's one of the things this government needs to learn, to give their people that opportunity. The lemming mentality may be great for running government, but it's not great for representation, Mr. Speaker.

The last too that's on this particular page is too many of our Aboriginal citizens remain excluded from our social and economic and civil life . . . civic life. And why is that again, Mr. Speaker? It's because this government sees itself still in a paternalistic and a maternalistic attitude toward our Aboriginal community. Instead of giving them some of the possibilities and the responsibilities that I think would take them a long way toward the self-sufficiency that is much desired, but this government seems to feel they want the control of it all.

I am proud to be part of my constituency. And I just mention that geographically it's the smallest rural constituency in Saskatchewan, probably about 40 miles by about 40 miles, compared to my colleague here who mentioned that he has about one citizen per square mile. I haven't figured that out in my constituency but it would probably end up being a dozen to two or three dozen per square mile, which makes it very easy for me to know a lot of the people in my constituency and to know the communities very well.

I have a great group of people in my constituency. A group of people that cares for one another. Not that that's unique to Saskatchewan, but I think it's probably stronger in my constituency than it is in most.

In my community we have a store called The Clothes Basket, and what they do . . . it's run by voluntary people, and they take goods that people bring there on a voluntary basis and give that, turn that into a store, and all the money that's made from that — and it's literally tens of thousands of dollars in every single year — is given to charity sources.

People in my constituency are well-known for their organizations, and MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) is one of those, where they'll go throughout the world literally where there are disasters have taken place and help in those situations. That's the kind of constituency that Rosthern constituency is, and I'm proud to be part of it.

Rosthern constituency is also an independent group. It shows up in different sorts of ways, and one of them seems to be if I talk with members from all sides of the House and ask how many people are calling your office for help and I compare it to what the history of that is in my constituency — fewer people calling for help. The people who call for help need it and they get it. But there's a real sense of independence and doing things on your own.

The people of my constituency are a creative group, and I need to talk here to some extent about the rural group, the farm community. We probably have a larger variety of crops grown in the Rosthern constituency than any other single area of that size throughout the province. We've been blessed with the land and the weather that we can do that.

And so we're on the leading edge in agriculture — not just in growing different sorts of crops — working with the universities in the development. Our beef and dairy industry in the area are leaders. And I'll say something more later on about the dairy industry and what this government could and should be doing to help that.

Birds and pork. Special ideas from canary seed to elk, from bison to sheep dairies. Leadership in all areas of agriculture.

But it isn't only an agricultural area. There's also a lot of fabrication that takes place. Construction companies that exist there and work within the area and in the cities that are near to that. It is a good area to be part of.

We have as a rural constituency probably the only rural constituency in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, in which every single town is growing. There's not a town in the Rosthern constituency that is dying. They're all growing — every one of them.

And there's an interesting reason for that . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . And I hear a chirp from across the other side trying to take credit for it. But no, there may be a good reason if we want to look at politics. It happens to be one of the few constituencies in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, that has never voted NDP.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Heppner: — And I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, it's one of the key things — one of the key things that has kept that particular constituency growing as it has. Because the people in that constituency are prepared to go ahead and dig in and do it and work hard, and not look for government for help every time they turn around, as is the way of this socialist system.

But let me take you around the constituency and deal with a few of it. Every single community, as I said, is a growing community. Whether we look to the communities at the one corner, which would be Laird and Waldheim — smaller communities, but they've had some amazing growth. New houses, numbers of new houses built in each one of those this year.

My town of Rosthern, a growing town. Martensville and Dalmeny with their proximity to Saskatoon, growing very

rapidly. And the other communities of Rosthern and Hague and Hepburn, very fast growing communities. And it's exciting to be part of that constituency.

That's not to say, Mr. Speaker, that there aren't some difficulties that the people in my constituency have to face. And that's probably because this government, Mr. Speaker, is out of touch with rural communities that are growing. They have the mentality that rural Saskatchewan is dead and dying, and let's just turn away and let it happen.

And we'll look at the agricultural policies and we'll see that happening. We had the people that were in here from rural Saskatchewan yesterday. And they told this government very specifically, Mr. Speaker, that there were things they could do. Yes, if we're looking for big cash dollars in the short term, that is a federal responsibility and they're looking there. But this government has done things that has hurt rural Saskatchewan in a major way.

They have dumped a tax load on them through the education system. The off-loading that is unbelievable. Every single farmer in Saskatchewan when they look at their tax bill, it used to be that most of their taxes on their land went to the upkeep of their rural community for roads, for rodents, for taking care of weed control — all the things that are done in rural Saskatchewan. That's what the money went for.

And then there was another component — not that large — that for decades stayed at about the same amount that went for education. And yes, they said, it was a little bit unfair the percentages, but they would take their share of the load. This government, Mr. Speaker, has off-loaded onto the education system to the extent that now the major portion of that tax ticket when they look at it is the education portion. And the people know that is unfair.

They're prepared to pay their share, but why should they pay a percentage that is so out of touch with the rest of Saskatchewan. This government is responsible for that. This government can deal with it. This government, in eight years, has not dealt with it. They have made it worse year by year by year. There's been a shortfall on a regular basis from this government when it comes to funding for education. And the people in my constituency know that.

(1615)

The areas that we look at and the other things that were mentioned by the rural people that were in here, that this government could deal with, is fuel tax which has sort of been considered a bit like a road tax. Now why should a person driving around with his tractor on his field pulling a piece of equipment, growing food for the world, have to pay a tax on that fuel? There is no earthly reason on it. There are no roads he's using for that. He's driving around on his own property — for which he's being overtaxed as we just mentioned — and this government taxes him for that. No excuse for that whatsoever, and this government was told this yesterday but they don't seem to have been listening so far.

They were also told there were other areas they could work with, the safety net that needs to be worked on. Now AIDA was

supposed to be a safety net. It's been a disaster, no one argues that. But, Mr. Speaker, where was our Agriculture minister when AIDA was being created, when people were sitting around and deciding how should AIDA work? He wasn't there.

He should have been there, looked at that, and said, this is not going to work in rural Saskatchewan. This may work in Ontario, it may work in British Columbia, but it's not going to work in Saskatchewan. It's just a plan that is bad. He wasn't even there. He was on holidays.

Had he been there and not caught on, we would have said well at least he tried but he's a member of the NDP government so not catching on has happened before. But he was gone, just colour him gone.

So then when they get the plan, they wonder why it's so bad. Saskatchewan did not have any input into it. We should have.

One other thing this government could do and that is reduce red tape for farmers. And I know business often complains about it — farmers have it.

There is in my area a real opportunity for growth, Mr. Speaker, in the dairy industry. We have many dairies. At just about any spot in my constituency you could probably count between a dozen to two dozen silos, all for dairies.

We do have people moving in from Europe into our dairy industry; we have people coming in from out of province, from Alberta and from British Columbia, to try and set up for the dairy industry in Saskatchewan. Why do they come? Our land costs are less and the opportunity is there. But the one thing they complain about is, not the opportunity that's out here for the dairy industry, what they complain about is the red tape. Not only is there an unbelievable amount of red tape that's there, but it changes as they go through it.

And, Mr. Speaker, I do have examples and they have made contact with the present Agriculture minister to meet with him and just explain some of those concerns to him so we that can reduce some of that red tape and give that opportunity for growth in this province that could be there. So far the Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan hasn't responded.

An Hon. Member: — Those are the government ties that bind.

Mr. Heppner: — Those, as my colleague says, are the government ties that bind. And it's fortunate in spite of my namesake that I can't sing it or I might try to. And I'm getting much support from this House on that conclusion.

The other thing that this government needs to pay some attention to, and particularly in my area where the communities are growing, is the infrastructure, where the things that supplied enough water for communities 10 years ago aren't satisfactory anymore because the demands have gone up. That's unique in rural Saskatchewan unfortunately, but it's there in my constituency and needs to be dealt with.

We have schools, almost all of them packed, full, overflowing. We need some major building programs in schools in my constituency . . .

An Hon. Member: — All across this province.

Mr. Heppner: — And all across this province. But right at this point, I'll probably stay with representing my constituency.

Martensville, rapidly growing, those schools are full. They're literally full and running over and we need some, we need some building there. They're full.

The town of Hepburn hasn't had a building program in probably 20 years. There's actually floors that kids are falling through because they're so bad because they have a whole group of portables that literally rotted away over the years. And we need a building program there.

The community of Osler has a gym that's crumbling — no money coming from this government.

The town of Rosthern's elementary school doesn't have a gym. So we've contacted one Minister of Education after another one. Now we have this Liberal/NDP Minister of Education who knows not whether he's a Liberal or an NDP, so it's hard to know whether he'll understand a need when he sees it.

So the community of Rosthern has largely given up on the NDP government for getting a lot of help for their gymnasium so they've brought in sports personalities. Last year they brought in Ken Dryden, had a big supper, had an auction, raised money.

This year they brought in Gordie Howe. Now the only unfortunate thing is that we couldn't get the present Minister of Education and Gordie Howe in a corner somewhere, because from what I hear of Gordie Howe and his history in the corners, we would have probably had all the money we need for our gymnasium in Rosthern very quickly.

And before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I must say a word or two about highways in my area. I'm going to make a statement that may surprise a few people, at least at the start, and that is that we have some of the better highways in the province in my constituency. I'm aware of that. My colleagues are very jealous of that.

But there's a reason for that, Mr. Speaker. It's because the highways that run through my constituency, Highway 11 and 12, are among the busiest highways in the province and getting much busier very quickly. The tourist trade in summer literally plugs those highways as people from almost all of Saskatchewan funnel through Saskatoon and then out to The North.

The trucking traffic, the commercial traffic going up to the uranium mines, going down both those highways to different parts of northern Saskatchewan. Those highways are very busy and for that reason there has been some upgrading, there has been some twinning. It was necessary. It was necessary.

And there's some more twinning needed because the accident rate on those highways is increasing. There is no one living in my constituency that hasn't lost someone, an acquaintance that they're aware of, on those highways through a highway accident and that is a disaster. So there is more work needed. There is much more work needed there.

Now I will be speaking personally with the Minister of Highways hopefully sometime this week about a situation that was created near Martensville. They built a beautiful section of twinned highway, Mr. Speaker. They made it so smooth it's become treacherous. And there's a look of awe and the mouths are open around this House that I said that. It is so smooth that they've actually put up warning signs for about a four- or five-mile stretch of highway, warning signs that have flags and flashing lights saying 60 kilometres per hour on a divided highway that is perfectly smooth. It is like glass — it is treacherous.

Now I will have a question for the Minister of Highways — and he's here right now, so it will give him a chance to prepare an answer — and that is did they sign off on the contract and then find out, oops, we said everything was okay and the contractor is off the hook and now we have a stretch of highway that in the best of conditions we have to have a 60 kilometre speed limit? Sixty kilometre speed limit on the smoothest highway in Saskatchewan — not because it has, not because it has holes like most of the rest of Saskatchewan but because it's that smooth.

The other question is, that I'm going to have for the Minister of Highway, is who's responsible for an accident that happens on that stretch due to the slickness on that highway? Is it the Department of Highways?

The 60-kilometre sign in there, Mr. Speaker, is an advisory. Now you have a real interesting situation, Mr. Speaker. It's an advisory which says: we think it's probably a good idea to go 60 kilometres but you can go a hundred if you wish.

So all the cautious drivers in Saskatchewan that go down that stretch, about half of them, are driving 60 kilometres, all people who drive like the other half are going 100 kilometres, so you got two drastically different speeds going down this stretch of highway, which is treacherously slippery.

This government creates one hazard after another even on their new stretches of roadway, which means that all the rest of the people in Saskatchewan have a good understanding why their highways are as bad as they are when they leave them in disrepair and don't even work on those. But, as I said, I will be talking with the Minister of Highways on that and we will get that straightened out.

The Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, had a lot of concerns. It raised concerns about all the too many this and too many of everything else. But there are some answers in here, some answers. There's a hint at a tax cut.

Mr. Speaker, who during the election spoke of tax cuts? Only one party, only one party. Those people said no, no, nobody wants tax cuts. The Liberals didn't know what a tax cut was. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're aware of that. Only one party that spoke of tax cuts. There's a hint of it in here.

Now maybe the NDP have vaguely caught that the people of Saskatchewan, because remember, Mr. Speaker, more people of Saskatchewan voted for the Saskatchewan Party than any other one — maybe the NDP have caught on that there was something good in the Saskatchewan Party. There is a hint of

tax cuts in here, but we're going to want to see how good those are.

This government set out its own tour, its own group, its own investigation about tax cuts. The reply came back, and I'm sure the Minister of Finance has it. It said very specifically what it should be. The taxpayers, the electors of this province, Mr. Speaker, had said very specifically during the election what they thought of tax cuts. Strong support. The major issue in Saskatchewan during the election. They suffered because they didn't listen.

He sends out the request from this tax report. It says a tax cut all the way across. Let's take some seniors, let's take some poor people off the income tax roll altogether. It's amazing, Mr. Speaker. This government that will stand up and try to bring tears to the eyes of Saskatchewan citizens about how they have this social conscience taxes people when they start making a little over \$6,000 a year. That is a mile away from a poverty line.

This government, when the people of Saskatchewan get barely over \$6,000 a year, they start dubbing them with income tax. That's supposed to be a tax on those people who can afford to pay it. Truly amazing.

So as we see more speeches in response to the Speech from the Throne coming from the NDP over there and as they try to bring out these tears with their social conscience, I would advise the people of Saskatchewan to look at what they do when it comes to tax structure and we'll know there is no social conscience there. None whatsoever.

But there is a hint, there's a hint of it in here, and we'll like to see what happens with it. There's a few other little hints in here and we'll like to see what happens in that.

If they are substantial, if they make sense, if they're practical, if they're what the people of Saskatchewan in the election indicated they wanted, the Saskatchewan Party is quite prepared to support them — quite prepared to support them.

Now will that happen? There is a chance. It is slim. It is slim. But there is a chance and we'll be watching, and watching very closely.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I could spend a lot of time talking about job creation and these people with a social conscience having the worst job record in Canada — the worst job record — and they think they have a social conscience.

I've said something about taxes. I've said something about health care. And the one line that I do have to make sure that I have on record today is that the longest lineups in the health care system in Canada exist, Mr. Speaker, in the home of Tommy Douglas — in his province. What a shame. The people who want to maintain health care, who feel it's their responsibility that without the NDP health care would fall, with them it has fallen in Saskatchewan.

We have the longest lineups; we have two-tier health care. Why do people have to go down to Minnesota to get their health care when for a fraction of the cost we could have had it here in

Saskatchewan? Two-tier health care under this government.

I could have spent a lot of time on the welfare numbers — the worst in Canada from an NDP government that claims to have a social conscience.

I've said something about highways. I've said something about population growth, retail sales. Just a word or two about crime; just a word or two about crime.

This particular government has not been able to put any teeth into any of the laws of this particular province to be able to lessen crime in this province, because why are some of our cities, from time to time, the number one car thief capital of Canada? That should be an honour that belongs to Vancouver or Hamilton, not here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, where we pride ourselves on being a province of people who help one another, who are neighbourly.

(1630)

It's this government and their record that have been in government for most of the years of the last 40 years that has brought that about. They take pride in that record; they have to take responsibility for it.

Why do we have cities in this particular province, Mr. Speaker, that are the break-in capital of the world? They have no answers.

The Saskatchewan Party has the answers. We have answers for all of these. The people of Saskatchewan showed that in this election. And for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to arise in the Assembly today and enter into the Throne Speech. I want to set out a, Mr. Speaker, by a . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . and it's nice to be back too, Dan, thank you.

I want to start out, Mr. Speaker, by congratulating you on your election to the position of Speaker of the House. I know and I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, if all the members of this House were able to and allowed to speak from their heart, they would acknowledge the fact that you are definitely the best person to fill the role. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the member from Regina Coronation Park upon his election as the Deputy Speaker for this House. I hope that our path that we have going right now will fulfill itself and will continue to bear fruit for many, many years to come. Thank you.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, my seatmate, for the excellent, excellent job of moving the Throne Speech. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to not only hear her in the

House, but to be able to share many of the wise thoughts here as my seatmate, and I really appreciate that — congratulations.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Regina . . . Saskatoon — pardon me — Sutherland, for his moving the Throne Speech and it was a pleasure to hear both of my colleagues rise in the House and first move and second the Throne Speech because it made it very, very clear to me upon listening to them why the people of their constituency recognize that they were the best people to represent them in this House and voted for them overwhelmingly — congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — I also at this time want to congratulate the Premier. I think that the Premier has achieved something that is very rare in Saskatchewan politics and that is a third-term government. In fact, it's only happened four times in our history since 1905. The other previous times was the very first Premier of Saskatchewan, Walter Scott, and I don't know what the economic conditions were around those times, probably in 1915-16 somewhere around that would have been his third term of government.

But in the 1950's when Tommy Douglas was able to achieve third-term government and in the 1970's when Allan Blakeney was able to achieve third-term government, they were done at times of strong economy and a time when the agricultural economy was strong. And I find I take a great deal of pride and, as I said, want to congratulate the Premier on achieving it in a time when the agricultural economy in this province was not strong. In fact our producers in Saskatchewan are facing some of the toughest times since the 1930s.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many times the question has been asked me by my colleagues on this side of the House and my many friends on the opposition side, is that yes, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be back in this Assembly. And I'm very proud, Mr. Speaker, that I am honoured to have the opportunity to represent the fine people of Regina Northeast.

Regina Northeast, Mr. Speaker, is a unique constituency, I suppose, because I think it represents a complete cross-section of our city of Regina. The boundaries of the fine constituency is Albert Street to the west side, Victoria Avenue to the south, Quebec Street to the east and then it follows Saskatchewan Drive up to Winnipeg Street; up Winnipeg Street to 6th Avenue North; and then it takes in all the industrial section including Uplands area and to the city limits on the north. So it encompasses some of the core area, some of the old Churchill Downs area, and the Uplands area. So I find it quite unique when I'm out door knocking and canvassing in the constituency because I think we have the opportunity to represent a whole cross-section of our community.

And I had the — I guess use distinct — pleasure to be nominated as the NDP candidate back in January 23 of last year. And soon after that, in fact the first week in February, we started to get out and door knock because I'm a new candidate and a new constituency and I'm from the old school of politics, I guess, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that if you're going to ask people to support you and to entrust you with their vote, it's

incumbent upon you to get out and talk to people and get to know them and visit with them for a few moments.

So we started door knocking and I found that a very, very interesting, very interesting experience because what I found — a number of things, I suppose, quite interesting — but one of the things that stand out most in my mind was the fact that on a number of doors I had knocked on, the couple or the individual answering the door in the conversation soon related to me that they had been in Regina here and in Saskatchewan here for perhaps a year, 18 months, maybe even two years. So I'd ask them, obviously you weren't born or raised here, so where did you move from? And the answers I got — B.C. (British Columbia), from Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and even one from Quebec.

In fact, my next door neighbour, a couple which just moved here from Quebec, about three or four months ago.

So each one of these folks, I would ask them what was it that prompted them to move to Saskatchewan, what reason did they come here and leave BC, Alberta, Ontario, as the case may be. And I was surprised, Mr. Speaker, at how many of them said the cost of living. Job opportunity and the cost of living.

It became very evident to them that the job opportunities were in Saskatchewan. But what became also very evident to them was that Saskatchewan was the cheapest province in Canada to live in. They fully realized that when they brought their paycheque home and when they made . . . paid the utility bills and made all the payments and paid all the bills that were required for day-to-day living, they had more disposable income here in Saskatchewan than any other province in Canada.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I just found that out door knocking in my constituency was quite enlightening.

And I suppose in some ways, Mr. Speaker, I had a bit of an edge here because the constituency boundaries of Regina Northeast, for the most part, not all of it but for the most part, lie in the same federal boundaries of the federal constituency of Regina Qu'Appelle. And, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of working with two MPs that have served that federal riding.

First, I had the opportunity of working with Simon de Jong who was the MP for Regina Qu'Appelle for a number of years. And I had the opportunity of working with Simon for his last two years as he served as a Member of Parliament. And then in 1997, with the federal election that took place at that time, Mr. De Jong did not seek re-election.

Mr. Nystrom ran in his place for the New Democrats and I was asked by Mr. Nystrom, soon after the election, to join his team and to be his chief of staff and executive assistant. And that, Mr. Speaker, was certainly an experience and I think a very positive experience because it gave me personally the opportunity to view politics from both sides, both the federal aspect of politics and the provincial aspect of politics in my past life and now as a member here. So I find that, hopefully in some ways, has enabled me to be even a better representative for the fine people of Regina Northeast.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will admit I have my work cut out for me. As you know, Regina Northeast was formerly represented by Mr. Ned Shillington, who I had the privilege of being a colleague with from 1991 and '95 but who I am very proud to be able to call a friend. And I know that all the people in this House who had the opportunity to know Ned know him for the fine gentleman that he certainly is.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — And all the people who had the opportunity to serve with Ned in this Assembly over the 24 years of his career certainly recognize the true legislator that he was.

It is my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that Ned Shillington in his experience, in his dedication to the public office has set a standard for anyone in public office to try to measure up to. He has set that scale very, very high, Mr. Speaker. And I will be the first to admit that I will probably not be able to reach that scale but I will promise the people of Regina Qu'Appelle and the Assembly here that I will do my best to reach as far up that scale as possible.

I had many experiences I suppose, Mr. Speaker, out door knocking in my constituency and I enjoyed those experiences because I think it pointed out some things to me that I wasn't, you know, I wasn't aware of before, in that in the boundary . . . lies within the boundaries of Regina Northeast is a large, large business community. In fact Regina Northeast has more businesses in its constituency, or in our boundaries, than any other constituency in Regina. We have in excess of 900 businesses in the constituency.

So it's a . . . it's a rather unique constituency and I've certainly enjoyed the opportunity to be out there. I'm looking forward to getting back out there again and meeting with folks, because as I said earlier I'm from the old school. And I believe if you're going to represent people you have to get out and visit with them, meet them, get to hear their concerns in order to be able to represent them fairly here in the legislature.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — And, Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pride and joy that I enter into this debate on the Throne Speech. I have in my very short political career had the opportunity of hearing and reading a number of Throne Speeches, but this is by far the best one I have been able to participate in. The Throne Speech certainly is visionary, certainly is forward-looking, and, Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a Throne Speech that is embarking Saskatchewan on a brand new day.

There's no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt that in this brand new day we are going to face many, many challenges. And, Mr. Speaker, sometimes in this legislature the easiest place to face challenges is from the opposition benches, because the opposition can criticize knowing that they are never going to have the responsibility of government and never going to have to implement any of their policies.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the opposition members that they should enjoy, enjoy their numbers that they're enjoying in this term because that is the highest numbers that

the history of Saskatchewan will ever show the Saskatchewan Party achieving in Saskatchewan.

But there are, as I said, Mr. Speaker, many challenges that are facing our government, facing the province of Saskatchewan. I think that was fairly, fairly evident and fairly well demonstrated yesterday and yesterday evening when we had a number of farm delegations come in here and put forward the plight of agriculture in our province.

I, Mr. Speaker, have I think a reference to agriculture, having enjoyed a career in farming for nearly 20 years before entering the world of politics and getting misled, I guess you would say, in the way of life.

But many of our farmers, many of our farmers are facing difficulty, Mr. Speaker. They're facing difficulty not through any fault of their own, but facing difficulty because of unfair trading practices.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1645)

Mr. Harper: — We're seeing in the European Common Market subsidies that clearly distort the agricultural markets. We're seeing in the United States, subsidies that clearly distort the world trading balance. And we're seeing a federal government has turned a blind eye to that real happening. It's turned a blind eye to the plight of Canadian and Saskatchewan farmers, and that, Mr. Speaker, I personally find unacceptable.

And I want to acknowledge the fine efforts of the coalition group that has gone to Ottawa from Saskatchewan here and placed squarely on their shoulders the responsibility of the agricultural crisis where it belongs, is on the shoulders of the federal government.

And I encourage the many farm groups, I encourage the members on this side of the House, and yes, the members on the other side of the House, to continue to work together co-operatively in an effort to find financial relief for our farmers. Because the questions that are facing Saskatchewan farmers is much, much bigger than the world of politics. It's a question of survival. It's a question of being a human being.

I think I can say that, Mr. Speaker, because I have a number of relatives, friends, and former neighbours who are today still making their livelihood on the farm. And I've had the opportunity over the last three or four months to sit down with many of them and discuss with them their plight.

Some of the stories are really sad, Mr. Speaker. Really, really sad. In fact, I know of some families out there who are not going to enjoy a very merry Christmas this year, Mr. Speaker, because I have just in the last couple of weeks assisted them to find some assistance in Social Services.

These are proud people, Mr. Speaker, who have not enjoyed the benefits, I guess you would say, of the same as their colleagues, their farmer counterparts in Europe and the United States. And it is not a pleasant sight, Mr. Speaker.

But despite the farm economy and despite the fact that Saskatchewan is facing the worst times in agriculture since the 1930s and probably some of the lowest commodity prices since then, the Saskatchewan economy as a whole has stayed strong.

And I think that augurs well for what has been achieved in this province under this administration, under this government since 1991. Particularly taking into account, Mr. Speaker, that in 1991 — and I had the opportunity of being a member of this House at that time — we took over a province that had just been ravished with debt, a province that was soon discovered had nearly a \$15 billion debt.

And I know the opposition members are going to say, oh yes this is old rhetoric, we've heard it before. But I think we must be reminded of this from time to time because this is the basis of the recovery of the economy of Saskatchewan, is to dealing with that debt.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'll be very honest with you. I have no idea how big a pile a billion loonies would be. In fact, Mr. Speaker, unlike some of the members opposite who may, I have no idea how big a pile a million loonies would make.

So I will share with you a secret and I will share with my colleagues and the members in this House here a secret. In 1992, I believe it was, I was enjoying the company of my family at the Thanksgiving table. And my youngest daughter who was in university at that time, was home, and we were discussing the economy of Saskatchewan and the debt situation of this province and so on. And I shared with her the thoughts that I couldn't in my mind imagine how big a pile a billion loonies would be, let alone a million loonies.

So she sat there for a few moments and then she said, dad, she said, did you ever think to relate it to something perhaps that you can understand or visualize, and that is time. I said no, I didn't. So she got out her calculator and a pencil and she punched out the numbers and she said, do you have any idea how long a million seconds is? I said, well no, I know how long one second is. I can visualize more or less how long a minute is or even how long an hour is, but a million seconds, no.

She said, well for your information, a million seconds is equal to twelve and a half days. Whoa, I said, that's a pretty big pile of loonies then. If a million seconds is twelve and a half days, it'd make a pretty big pile of loonies there.

So a few more moments later she said, dad, have you any idea how long a billion seconds is? And I said, well, let's see. Twelve and a half days, twelve and a half days — oh, probably a month and a half, something like that. She said no, no. A billion seconds is equal to 32 years — 32 years.

So, Mr. Speaker, now we can understand, at least I hopefully can understand a little better, the debt situation that this province was facing in 1991. And if you take a look at that enormous debt on a population of a million people in 1991 to where it is today in 1999, reduced to 11.5 billion, thusly reducing the interest payments, thusly leaving more surplus money for programs that benefit people, that, Mr. Speaker, is no small accomplishment. That is no small accomplishment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — And a credit for that accomplishment, Mr. Speaker, has to go to the Premier and the fine group that has served this province as government since 1991.

An Hon. Member: — 1999.

Mr. Harper: — Since 1991. And my colleague here, Mr. Speaker, just brought to my attention that this is a new day, that there are new things dawning, and I have to agree with my colleague that there is no doubt that this is probably the finest group of individuals on this side of the House ever to lead this province in government. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — We know, Mr. Speaker, that there are many challenges facing government. We know that we have to work towards a partnership to build prosperity in Saskatchewan because we want Saskatchewan to be the province that we know it can be, and that is a province of opportunity and a province of prosperity. That can be achieved, Mr. Speaker, by government working together with business, working people, communities, co-operatives, and government pulling it all together, making it work because we know it can be done in Saskatchewan and it will be done in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — I don't suppose, Mr. Speaker, there's ever been a time when education wasn't important. It's always been important, but never a time more important than now. As the world has changed, and changed very dramatically in the last number of years. Particularly in the last couple of decades we are seeing the need for education much, much greater because if we're going to maintain a strong economy we have to have an educated workforce.

We have to have the ability to give to the young people the tools to meet the challenges of tomorrow because the challenges today are not like they were 20, or dare I say, 30 years ago when I entered the workforce. Then the competition was local, the competition was perhaps provincial. But in today's world the competition for jobs, the competition in the business community, is global. Today we don't compete with just our friends and our neighbours, we compete with people halfway around the world.

And I'm not sure who said this, Mr. Speaker, but an economic professor of a few years back said that the amount of change that we've seen in our society in the last 100 years, we are going to see that much change again in the next 10. Now that seems very dramatic, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes I even question the wisdom of it.

But if you stop to think that just not all that many years ago you would have not been able to watch a sporting event happening half way around the world in Japan, where today you can see it instantaneously. The marvels of modern technology are beyond my wildest imagination and I think we may be just seeing the tip of the iceberg.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, for the well-being of our provincial economy, for the well-being of Canada, we must pursue a strong — with all vigour — a strong educational program to ensure that our young people have the tools to meet the challenges of the future.

And, Mr. Speaker, just before I conclude, I would like to bring to your attention an issue that I also see was addressed in the Throne Speech but an issue also that I'd run into on a number of occasions on a doorstep when I was out campaigning, both before the election and during the election campaign itself.

And that was the subject of health care. And, of course, each and every one of us have our own opinions on the different mechanisms of health care, the different ways it should be delivered. Perhaps it could be better here, perhaps it could be better there. And there's no doubt that many of these thoughts and opinions probably have a fair amount of merit.

But I want to share something with you, Mr. Speaker, that I found extremely interesting as I went door to door and started keeping track of the issues as they were coming forward.

I would run into a scary story in health care that somebody said that they were in the waiting . . . waited in emergency rooms for 16 hours or 13 hours or whatever the magic number happened to have been or somebody else has been waiting for surgery for months and months and months.

But when I'd ask these folks to identify who this magic person was, they failed to be able to identify the person simply because they were, in a lot of cases, Mr. Speaker, figments of people's imagination — mostly from the opposition benches might I say.

But what I did find interesting, Mr. Speaker, what I did find interesting, Mr. Speaker, is when I had the opportunity of knocking on the door of Mr. John . . . he was John Smith on Cornwall Street, second block Cornwall Street, who had just come through a very unpleasant experience, and that is he had a kidney stone removed. He'd spent the required time in the hospital and he was full of praise for our health care system. He had just experienced the system. He had nothing negative to say about the system. He only had praise for the system, Mr. Speaker.

A few days later I was over on McDonald Street — I believe it was second, second or third block McDonald Street — and I run into a lady there who receives dialysis three times a week at the General Hospital. And, Mr. Speaker, she had been receiving this for two or three months and she had nothing but praise to say about our health care system. She is experiencing it first-hand — first-hand knowledge, Mr. Speaker — and she had nothing but praise to say about it.

And right, in fact it was the day before election day, I was knocking on doors on Lorne Street — and I can even remember the apartment building; it was 411 Lorne Street — and the lady — I can't remember her name right offhand but it seems to me it was Granding or Grundy or something along that line, and she lives at apartment no. 7. I knocked on her door. She invited me in. She asked me to because she wanted to talk to me a few minutes about health care, and she said I've never supported one political party over the other and she said I voted for them

all at some point in time.

She said this time I'm going to be voting New Democrat because, Mr. Speaker, of her experience with her daughter and the health care system. Her daughter had gone . . . had been bothered with her knee for a period of time. She went to her family doctor. The family doctor examined the knee, said I'm going to refer you to a specialist — 30 days to the day she had her appointment with a specialist. The specialist said in my opinion you need surgery and 38 days from the date she seen her specialist she had her surgery.

That, Mr. Speaker, was, I think, a reasonable turnaround time in our health care system. Mrs. Grundy thinks it's a reasonable time turnaround time in the health care system and that's one of the primary reasons that she supported me in the last election.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to rise in this House and offer my support to the Throne Speech. I will be supporting the Throne Speech and certainly not the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I realize that the members in the Assembly are just looking forward to listening to me debate and present my speech in regard to the reply from the Speech of the Throne. I certainly would love to get into some of the debate regarding taxation or regarding the direction that this government is getting into, but in view of the fact that it's reaching that time of the day, I would suggest we adjourn debate.

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.

