

EVENING SITTING

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. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could just reiterate some of the comments I made before adjournment . . . Even though the members opposite said they've heard it before, I'll repeat it one more time, at least the part about the special, talented person that we have in our community, amongst many others.

As I had indicated earlier, we have an artist by the name of Ms. Jacquie Berting who works with lamp-worked glass. And as I mentioned earlier, she's created a creation called Glass Wheat Field which has toured across Canada. It's made up of 14,000 waist-high glass wheat stalks, each individually hand cut and lamp worked. Her work is a symbol of hope, dedicated to the farmers of Saskatchewan, and that's something that we certainly need at this point in our history.

If I could turn my attention, Mr. Speaker, to a few comments on the health care services that we have in this province today — or don't have as my colleague says.

During the last decade, rural Saskatchewan has seen an erosion of health services. Closures of hospitals and losses of doctors are all too common. In the past we could find many medical services in many of our communities. Now we are forced to travel longer distances, mainly to large urban centres.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, I heard a member from the government side of the House say that there is no basis to many of the complaints we hear about our health care system. In fact the member went on to say that a lot of the complaints were, and I quote, "figments of people's imaginations." Figments of people's imaginations — is that the government's position on hospital closures, long waiting lists, and reduced services, especially in rural Saskatchewan?

The Speaker: — Order, order please. Order. Order please. I would ask that all hon. members please keep it down so that we can hear the speech from the hon. member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, since being elected I have had more complaints about health care than any other topic. Things such as waiting 10 to 12 months for elective surgery, being on the operating table and then told to get dressed and go home because there's no bed for you. Are these figments of the people's imagination? I think not.

Seniors make up a good portion of the residents in our towns and villages. During the election campaign, senior after senior voiced their concerns over the never-ending utility rate increases that we've seen in the last eight years.

Comments such as "every time my power and gas bill goes up I have less money to spend on food and clothing since I'm living on a fixed income" were routinely heard on the doorsteps.

Seniors also have concerns over long-term care and home care. And even when the NDP (New Democratic Party) decided to add more long-term care beds, they continued to play their games with their partners, the local municipal governments. Take the case of the Golden Acres project in Wynyard where the portion that was to be a hundred per cent funded by local municipalities has nearly doubled from \$435,000 to \$800,000. What they have done is they've shifted cost-shared items to the locally funded responsibilities.

As the student numbers continue to decline in our rural schools, new and innovative ways must be found to ensure that our students have proper access to the education system. We cannot afford to have a two-tier system that disadvantages students from rural Saskatchewan. At the same time, however, we must address the issue of education tax on farmland. I was happy to see that the government is finally going to look at this problem. However, until there's evidence of this in the budget, the jury is still out.

Post-secondary education is often more costly for rural students simply because education and training facilities are not available in their hometowns. Methods must be found to bring more training courses to rural centres. Often there are the physical resources available and all that's needed is the supplies and instructors. This is already happening to some extent and I encourage the expansion of this type of training wherever possible.

We have four First Nation communities located within the boundaries of Last Mountain-Touchwood. I have seen the successes and failures of First Nations people. I know the sense of hopelessness that some of their young people have. It is my hope that I can play a small part in helping First Nation people have more successes than failures. And to that extent I pledge to work with these communities in the way they deem suitable.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning of this address, Last Mountain-Touchwood has a history, a long history, of being very politically aware. For 50 years the riding was considered a bellwether riding as we always elected a member to the government side of the Assembly. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I said 50 years. But that all changed September 16. Prior to '95, Wynyard and area were added to Last Mountain-Touchwood as part of the constituency reorganization. Since 1944, Wynyard has always been represented by a CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party) MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) — that is, until September 16, 1999.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hart: — So what caused such a dramatic shift in voting

patterns? Perhaps the comments of a lifelong NDP supporter can explain. He commented, and I quote, "these guys (referring to the government) don't give a damn about rural Saskatchewan, and they don't listen to the people". As the election night showed, a lot of people felt the same way, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order, order, order. Order, please. I'd just ask the member to choose his words judiciously.

Mr. Hart: — In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I know this province can accomplish much more. We have all the ingredients to be a have province. We have the people. We have the resources. We have the technology. What we lack is vision and political will. And that, Mr. Speaker is what we in the Saskatchewan Party will provide.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment put forth by the member from Rosetown-Biggan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, I say most sincerely, a real pleasure to be able to stand in this House again.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — I have to admit I thought a lot about what I should say and what I could say at the start of this twenty-fourth legislature.

It's been interesting times, obviously, since the election. It has been very interesting watching on this side of the House as we've brought two parties together to form a government, a coalition government, for the first time in 70 years. It's been an interesting time to be here and witness as we try to bring Saskatchewan into the new century.

And I have to say that I'm very, very pleased to be back as the representative for Regina South. The members opposite clearly believed I wouldn't be. I dare say some members on our side dared or perhaps hoped that I wouldn't be. But I am in fact very pleased to be back.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — The election . . . I have to say I enjoyed this election. And perhaps that's a strange thing to say, considering how the result turned out. But I enjoyed very much the dialogue that in Regina South we had with various constituents about what they believed should be happening, what we should be doing differently, and their sense of where the province should be going as we got ready to enter the new century.

I was very, very enthused by the positive approach so many people had in my riding, their real sense of hope and optimism about where our province was going. And I think that that is something . . . it's a message I don't want lost in this debate. This is something I don't want lost in this debate because despite how dark things are at times in our province, I think all of us still believe things will get better. And that was certainly the case during the election.

I heard time and again people certainly expressed concern about health care; they certainly expressed concern that we need to make a higher priority of tax reduction. But there was underlying that a sense of confidence that Saskatchewan people had the ability, had the resources, and had the sense of direction that we could in fact remould this province and get it ready for the 21st century. I was very encouraged by that. That's not to say that this was an easy election. Regina South, as you know, is always an interesting and very, very involved riding. People have a great interest in politics; they follow it relatively closely; and they have numerous opinions. There is often a very big difference of opinion within the constituency as to what the direction should be taken.

The coalition government is a real positive in this regard. It allows both of the parties — the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party, the New Democratic Party which I represent — it allows us the opportunity to refashion some of our election platform to something that is more acceptable with the population.

The problem with going out into an election, and the members opposite will know this, is that you put forward what you think is your best possible platform and often you get feedback from that during that campaign. And it's always a debate. I've listened over this past week as members opposite have gone after the member for Saskatoon Northwest for some of his election commitments. And it is a real conundrum if you think about it. Because we campaign on the one hand on a platform that we put forth saying this is what we want to do, and yet the people also expect us to listen to what they've told us in the campaign. And they expect us to make the changes to be more in line with what they believe.

This coalition and this opportunity to be here now in this legislature provides us with an opportunity to refashion — I think on all sides — for all parties to come forward with a platform and with policy which will meet the needs of Saskatchewan people and meet those desires.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — That's not just something on our side, Mr. Speaker. This, too, is an opportunity for the Saskatchewan Party opposite. Clearly their party did not receive the support in urban Saskatchewan it had hoped for. I know that they had certainly targeted my riding and they had hoped for greater support there than what they ended up with. This gives them a chance, too, to divorce the parts of their platform that were clearly unpopular, clearly unsuccessful, and left them without representation in some 32 seats. This gives them that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that they step away from the political rhetoric, and I hope they step away from the inflammatory comments, and I hope that they take the opportunity to review how it is that they can make their policies acceptable to all the people of Saskatchewan as we are trying to do on this side.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, it would be easy for us to simply say now that there are 32 of us on this side of the House, that this — representing primarily urban ridings — that our objective is to do the best possible that we can for urban

Saskatchewan that sent us here. But not a single speaker has said that on this side. Every single speaker on this side of the House that has spoken thus far — and I think the ministers in the question period answers— have shown that we have a real desire to represent all of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — And in this regard we will fundamentally differ, fundamentally differ from the government of Grant Devine in 1986 that found itself in similar, although somewhat different circumstances. That scorched-earth policy that that government embarked on, that mean-spirited attack on urban Saskatchewan — there will be no such action on this side, even though we find ourselves in presently difficult circumstances with under-representation in the rural areas.

And the fact that in this legislature, a short week ago, that we gathered for a historic meeting of the Agriculture Committee, that we invited farm leaders to come on to the floor of this Assembly and present their case, I think says a lot about how we are interested in hearing, in learning, in listening, and in representing rural Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1915)

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, this legislature will no doubt be a very interesting one over the next four years of its life. It's interesting because we have an opportunity to really come and move beyond just the political rhetoric. We do have an opportunity to work on a new platform, on new policies. We're at a very historic opportunity.

And I think the question is whether the members opposite can in fact set aside the meanness, set aside the partisanship and actually come to the Assembly with the desire to work on policy. It is difficult — and none of the members opposite, with the exception of the member from Moosomin, have ever sat in the government — it is difficult for a governing party to come forward and say that it has made mistakes. We've come forward and said that we've made mistakes, and we understand that.

Well the member from Watrous sits in the back row and heckles — and that's welcome, welcome to the House, I'd like to welcome her — and says no, in fact, that we did not . . . we have never admitted a mistake, this isn't true. We've admitted that we've made mistakes. The fact that we lost so many members, and I have to say the fact that on election night I watched so many friends go down to defeat, is difficult. But I like to think that we've learned from that. I welcome tonight the presence of Vi Stanger who I consider to be a very good friend and a very capable member for the constituency of Lloydminster for some eight years.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I want to say, earlier today we welcomed the fact that the former member for Last Mountain-Touchwood was here in the House. And I look at these people and I think it's refreshing that they continue to still feel such a commitment to the political life of this province that

they are interested in coming here and watching this.

I thought it was sad to see the members opposite heckle Vi Stanger when she came into the House tonight. I'm not really sure that that shows the type of sportsmanship or gamesmanship or respect, frankly, for this Assembly that we would expect from a party that talks so much about it. When we get to the point that we're heckling the former members who come to witness our proceedings, I think it's sad because we're watching a party opposite talk about how it wants to reinvent itself. It's supposed to represent the best of what's Saskatchewan and yet all I see is a rather mean-spirited approach and it's unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, before I leave the topic of the election, I want to say that there are a couple of other issues I've heard over the last couple of weeks . . . or last week as we've listened to debate.

The members opposite have time and again said the people of Saskatchewan elected a minority government. The people of Saskatchewan elected 58 members to come to this Assembly. Every single member in this House — every single member in this House — won the right to sit in this Assembly. The fact that we would find two parties of like view who want to form a government I think speaks a great deal about the positive, optimistic approach that we can have as we get ready to go into this new century.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — I want to welcome, in particular, the new member for Saskatoon Northwest to the House. Grant Whitmore, the previous member, was a good personal friend of mine and I'm certainly saddened that Grant is not joining us here. But I join with the Premier and others who have said that the member for Northwest does bring a very sincere and new perspective to government. And I welcome that because I think that we need that and we welcome that as a government.

I also want to welcome my good friend, the member from North Battleford, over to this side of the House. The member, as all members who served in the previous legislature will know, has a very — I hate to say the word good — but he has sometimes a very good sense of humour, although often I found myself at the other end of it or the point of his jokes, but that is fine. I find that he as well brings a very sincere interest in making government work and making this province better. And having watched that through cabinet planning sessions and other discussions, I want to tell you that I really do feel good about the agenda that this government is laying forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss at this point if I didn't also congratulate you on your re-election as the member from Melville and your appointment, or your election, as Speaker of the Assembly. It is indeed a high honour, one enjoyed by very few members. And so on behalf of myself and my constituents, a most sincere congratulations.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Let me turn for a second — for a few minutes rather — to the agenda that this coalition government,

this NDP-led coalition government has developed. And I think that it speaks volumes about what we believe for Saskatchewan, and it speaks volumes about what we learned on September 16 . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well the member opposite says we learned nothing and yet his leader is quoted in the paper as saying we took half of their platform and implemented it.

I read through the card that was sent around with the Throne Speech. The first one talks about helping families make ends meet. And there are three points under here, the Partnership for Prosperity economic development plan that we're working on. And I think that it is real positive. It is something that, as we move forward, we will continue to see why Saskatchewan business, Saskatchewan workers, and Saskatchewan people continue to support this government. It is a positive economic agenda. It is an economic agenda that in the past has allowed Saskatchewan to lead this nation in economic growth.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — And it's something that the members opposite often forget. We have a tendency to dwell too much on the negatives. Granted we like to dwell on the things that we can change, that we can improve, but we should also stand and recognize the fact that Saskatchewan has been a leader in this nation in economic growth. Even today, with the serious problems facing rural Saskatchewan, there's still a prediction that the Saskatchewan economy will grow.

This is a positive sign. It's a sign that our economy is more diversified today than it has been at any point in its history. It's a sign that Saskatchewan people are continuing to work. It's a sign that Saskatchewan is taking advantage of the resource wealth it has in front of it. It's a sign that this province can meet the needs of its people as we enter into the next century.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing that we did hear loud and clear, though, is Saskatchewan taxpayers said that they wanted . . .

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

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, to ask leave to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Regina South. Colleagues in the legislature on both sides, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members, two very special people in your gallery. We have seated up there Norma Ash and her grandson, Tyler Ash. These two people did tremendous work through . . . Some of this debate is about an election. I'm delighted to report that they were volunteers in the good constituency of Regina Coronation Park, and I ask all members to welcome Norma and Tyler.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, as I had the floor I will take advantage of the opportunity to also introduce two members who are seated behind the bar, two former members . . .

(inaudible interjection) . . . I didn't know I needed leave, as I had the floor. But I'll request leave.

Leave granted.

Mr. Thomson: — My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't aware that when I had the floor making my textual comments that I needed leave to continue. But I would like to introduce a very good friend of mine, Sharon Murrell, who represented the Battleford-Cut Knife riding during the last Assembly, as well as the former member from Redberry, Mr. Walter Jess.

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. Thomson: — I take it I don't need leave to continue my comments. I don't dare ask for them for fear they wouldn't be given.

But as I return to the subject before us, the Throne Speech, I do want to talk a little bit about the income tax situation. People, particularly in Regina South, brought up time and again the fact that they wanted us to reduce personal income taxes. Over the past five budgets, since the budget was balanced by this NDP government, since the budget was balanced, we have reduced taxes in every one of those years.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we will continue on in that direction: to reduce taxes. People have told us that what they want is they want to see a reduction in income taxes. We agree. The method by which we go about reducing those, though, is of some discussion, and I'm very pleased that we have received the report from the personal income tax . . . that we have received the report of the personal income tax review commission. I think that it puts forward some very interesting points. It is a plan which in large part I support. Personally I believe that it meets the needs of the Regina South constituency.

There are, of course, some issues that we are going to have to give some thought to. The question of expanding the sales tax, the question of what items that it should be applied to, as well as the depth of those cuts, is certainly of interest, and I hear of some debate in my constituency.

I am, however, optimistic because at this point the discussion is about what the form of that tax cut should take and not whether or not there should be one. And that is in fact a very positive sign, and I think says a lot again about the direction this government is going in.

The plan before us, obviously put forward by Jack Vicq and his committee, is a very aggressive one which will potentially put

70 per cent of Saskatchewan's people on par with Alberta taxpayers. That's worth repeating because the party opposite, although it called itself the Saskatchewan Party during the last legislature, certainly talked a great deal about Alberta. Let me repeat this: 70 per cent of Saskatchewan taxpayers would be on par with Alberta on taxes but they would continue to enjoy Saskatchewan's medicare. This is the positive, that we are looking at a proposal which today can give us Saskatchewan's medicare, continue to fund Saskatchewan's social programs and our safety net, but allow Saskatchewan people significant tax reduction.

That's not to say there aren't detractors and that's not to say there isn't some legitimate debate about what we do on the sales tax. But in the coming months as we prepare for the budget this spring, that is what the debate in this province will focus in on, is to what extent do we balance out an expanded sales tax on the one hand and a significant reduction in income tax on the other.

The good news is we can tell Saskatchewan people that yet again under an NDP government there will be significant tax reduction.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, people in Regina South felt confident in this election that the economy was headed in the right direction. They agreed that we were in a position now to be able to more aggressively cut taxes.

On the whole, I represent one of the more affluent ridings in the province. I want to tell you that they are also concerned about those who are not in such a good position and those people in our province that do not share the wealth as equally as the rest of us do and do not share our opportunities.

I was particularly pleased, and I know many others were, to hear a report a few weeks ago that showed that Saskatchewan was the only province in Canada, the only province in Canada to reduce the rate of child poverty.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Ten years after the Parliament of Canada voted to get rid of child poverty, the only province that has succeeded in reducing it is not wealthy Alberta, it is not tax-cut Ontario, it is not British Columbia, it is not any one of the provinces except Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — And if anything, I think anything says that this Premier and this government deserve to govern another four years, it's the success on that alone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, there aren't a lot of poor kids in my riding, but there are a lot of people that understand the real cost of poverty to our communities. And there's a lot of people who look at it, not simply at what the benefit is to them, but they look at Saskatchewan as a large community. That's why I'm pleased that they support issues like our action plan for

children. That's why I'm pleased they support our initiatives in the community schools. And frankly representing an entirely urban riding . . . that's why I'm pleased that they support the call for a billion dollars in farm aid for ailing farm families.

That's what Saskatchewan's about. It's not a divisive province. It's not a province that says, just what's in it for me or how does it benefit me most. It's a province that everyone looks at and says, we're a million people. Yes, we're a large, diversified economy, but you know they're still my neighbours, and I'm still my brother's keeper. And I think that that is a real positive and a real attribute, and it says a lot about the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(1930)

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think it also says a lot about what the Saskatchewan Party has got to ask themselves in the coming months because in order to truly live up to the name, the Saskatchewan Party, they will need, in fact, to start appealing to all of Saskatchewan. It's not simply good enough to appeal to one base. It's not simply good enough to divide rural against urban, Indian against white; poor against affluent. That's not the way for us to be able to pull together as a province. That may be the way that some people are able to gain political success, but that is not what Saskatchewan people expect from their leaders.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I think that is a challenge for this 24th legislature . . . is to find a way for us to bridge our geographic constituencies and the special interests and the various interests that affect us so that we can find a way to come up with public policy and legislation and projects that are in fact able to address all the needs of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, the first speech I ever gave in this Assembly I was very pleased to be able to second the address in reply to the Throne Speech, a job very ably done this time by my new colleague from Saskatoon Sutherland. And I want to say at that point, members who were here in the 23rd legislature will remember that I spoke at some length about post-secondary education. I am very pleased that over that time period much has happened in post-secondary education, and I am very pleased that we are in the position to be able to move forward into a new direction in terms of dealing with post-secondary education.

The University of Regina abuts my riding although it's not actually in it, and we watch on an almost daily basis that campus changes as we see new buildings going up. Certainly the growth and development of the research park has been a very, very positive thing in southern Regina.

Indeed it will be a very positive thing for southern Saskatchewan with the new Petroleum Technology Research Centre which is being constructed. This will, as members opposite likely know, will enable us to move more new technology in and hopefully expand and lengthen the amount of time which our oil reserves will be able to be used. This should

also provide us with an opportunity to find more environmentally friendly mechanisms of extracting and using those petroleum resources. Regina is very, very pleased to see this kind of growth. We are obviously very happy to have it in this technology centre located in Regina, and we are very pleased about the role that the Opportunities Corporation, the Saskatchewan Opportunities Corporation, and our universities are playing in terms of developing that.

I am also pleased though that we have not simply done as previous governments have, and looked at it in terms of building monuments as a way of dealing with post-secondary education. The fact that the two parties have gathered together on this side of the Assembly as a coalition government, both dedicated themselves to tuition relief, I think speaks a great deal also about our view of where Saskatchewan should be.

Saskatchewan people have, for generations, put a very high emphasis on education. Families that I know have come from other countries have really instilled in them, in their children, the need to continue on with their education and they put a high priority on it. Hence, why we have such a wonderful institution in the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. It really is a testament to the foresight of political leaders, both in this legislature and throughout our communities, in terms of developing that sense of learning, that sense of scholarship, that Saskatchewan people have.

Clearly today the University of Regina is another centre of excellence in our country and provides a great access to many people in southern Saskatchewan and throughout the nation to come and study and learn and add to Saskatchewan's cultural and academic life.

The fact that the Liberal and New Democratic parties would both put forward platforms to try and make our post-secondary educational institutions more financially accessible I think is a very positive initiative. I can tell you that, as I was campaigning on the doorsteps, it is not the most popular initiative, but it was certainly a very progressive one.

Again this is a case where a lot of the debate was over how we should best reduce the cost of education, and not a debate about whether we should reduce it at all. This is in fact one of the reasons why I believe the Saskatchewan Party found little support in our major communities, and not simply Saskatoon and Regina, P.A. (Prince Albert), and Moose Jaw at this point I'm talking about, but other communities.

The community of Weyburn is an example. That city — a large urban centre, a small urban centre, whatever you care to call it — did not support the Saskatchewan Party. And yet it's interesting that the members opposite neglect to mention that.

One of the other challenges the members opposite will have is in fact to ensure that as they stand and talk and represent their ridings that they are representing all of their ridings, all of their constituency.

I listened to the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy speak this afternoon and read off to us — which was good because I hadn't seen them — read off the poll results for various of the rural polls in her riding, with the obvious view that what we

should do is pay attention to this because we did not fare well in them at all. However I thought it interesting that she neglected to read off the poll results from the city of Weyburn which incidentally she also represents.

But I hope that at some point the members opposite, as they set aside their bravado and actually get down to the business of doing the work for their constituents, will in fact attempt to involve all the constituents, those that voted for them and those that voted against them, in their decision making. I know that that is a challenge all of us have. I can tell you it is a difficult thing, particularly for new members. I was elected to this legislature for the first time in 1995 and it was again a difficult election. There was a lot of different views on what should be done. It was a very close election.

We've worked hard over that time period and I've worked very hard to try and gain a better appreciation for those who didn't vote for me, and I've tried to represent them as well as those who voted with me. It really is a real test that members opposite, particularly the new ones, will have and it is a challenge. But I think we all need to remember that we do represent all of the people, all of the constituents, not simply those who happened to vote with our party.

I say that not to lecture the members opposite but simply to offer to all new members throughout the Assembly that this is really a challenge. When I was elected to this House in 1995, I was 26 years old and I was a . . . It is hard to now think of myself as a more senior member of the Assembly, but I hope that I can tell you personally, Mr. Speaker, that I hope that I have learned from that term that the people afforded me so early in my life and I hope that I will be able to serve the people of Regina South ably and fairly over the next four years.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak very briefly on one other issue and that is the issue of agriculture. I am not by any means a farm boy. I grew up in small-town Saskatchewan, in Kindersley, as a child and lived there for most of my boyhood and clearly have some understanding of rural issues. But it is . . . the task that we find ourselves with today, looking at the agricultural situation, is a daunting one. It is one in which the solutions are not nearly as simple as the members opposite may wish us to believe.

I want them to know that all of us on this side, including those of us that represent affluent urban ridings, are deeply concerned about this issue and very interested in making sure that Saskatchewan's agricultural industry and Saskatchewan farm families are well represented.

I've told you some about my experience during the campaign door knocking. What I didn't tell you is that . . . personally it was a very difficult campaign for me in that my grandfather died on September 2, which as members will know fell in the middle of the campaign. My grandfather farmed at Alsask all of his life. He moved to Canada in 1925 and took up farming in Alsask, served as a RM (rural municipality) councillor in the RM of Milton, and with the exception of two years during the Depression, spent his entire time basically in Alsask. He was a proud . . . proud to be a farmer, he was a proud member of the Wheat Pool, and a proud supporter of the CCF and the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it was interesting that . . . well I will tell

this story; I wasn't going to. During the campaign when my grandfather died, we had some debate in the family about what to do for services. Part of the family, particularly the grandchildren that were still in farming, were trying to get the crops off; others of us, myself in particular, were involved in the election campaign. And because the campaign was, at that point, difficult in Regina South and we were in quite a fight, there was some discussion that I wasn't involved in, by the family, as to what we would do about funeral arrangements.

The decision was, from my aunts and uncles and my parents, that they had wanted those kids, those grandkids who were involved in farming, to stay on the fields. They had wanted to bring in the crop. They wanted those of us, myself in particular, who were involved in political life to continue to work in that because they thought that that was a good, living, ongoing testament to what my grandfather's life was.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — We respected those wishes and I continued campaigning that weekend. But I can tell you that it is something that I really do still wonder about because I do feel a sense of remorse for having missed that service.

I was interested to listen to the comments from the new member for Estevan the other day, and she read a statement about living on the farm that is, I thought, very poetic. It was also the back of my grandfather's memorial service program. And so I thought back to that and it was . . . I do believe that all of us, no matter where we live in Saskatchewan, do still feel a real commitment to our farm roots. And I want to thank the member for Estevan for including that in her speech. It was very thought-provoking and I found it very touching to hear it again.

I hope the members opposite, as they look across at us, representing Saskatoon and Regina and P.A. and Moose Jaw ridings — sorry to my colleague from Yorkton and the North, Yorkton, Meadow Lake, and other communities — I hope they don't simply look at us as city slickers who are somehow removed and distant. I hope that they do take us sincerely at our word that we are interested in the problems of rural Saskatchewan and are interested in moving forward and working towards those changes. That's not to say we're going to not from time to time disagree. You can be an urban-based party and have the best agriculture policy and perhaps see no reward and gain nothing out of it. You can be a party that represents rural Saskatchewan and perhaps have a somewhat less good agriculture platform, from a public policy standpoint, and perhaps you reap more reward. But I think all 58 of us in this Assembly are very interested in fixing the farm situation in this province.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say that I do welcome this opportunity to stand in this legislature as a member of the 24th Assembly to represent once again a very fine constituency, one that I have a great affection for — the constituency of Regina South — and represent the good people there. And I wish you and other members all the best. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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

I am honoured here today, Mr. Speaker, to be able to stand before you and this Assembly to the first session of the 24th legislature.

As the ending of 1999 draws to a close, a new beginning of the new year of optimism and hope awaits us. I want to take this time also, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate all the members of the Assembly on their victories as MLAs and also, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate yourself on your position of House Speaker. I also want to take this time to congratulate Lynda Haverstock on her announcement of her position as the upcoming Lieutenant Governor. And now, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my family — my wife, Sheila, my sons, Micky and Deny, my oldest son, Newton, and his fiancée, Tanya, and the love of my life, my granddaughter, Shaylynn. I want to thank them, Mr. Speaker, for their encouragement and help they gave me during my quest as an MLA. I also want to thank my election executive and the constituency members for all the help they did in making my dream come true.

(1945)

I want to thank my mother for entrenching in me the difference between right and wrong, and to know the difference between the words yes and no. I want to thank my brothers and my sister for . . . there's too many of them to name as I come from a large family. There are seven brothers and one sister in my family. Half of them live in Alberta, working. The other half live in Saskatchewan. They are farmers. The reason they are farmers is because once you're tied down to the farm in Saskatchewan now it's pretty hard to get rid of. And as years come, it's going to be harder to sell that farm.

We are losing so many, many young people to our neighbouring provinces. Why? The reason is, is because here there are no jobs, and there's too much taxes like PST (provincial sales tax). That's why they're going elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency is a very large area in north-central Saskatchewan. It stretches from west of Glaslyn to near the outskirts of Prince Albert. It stretches north to Big River and south to Duck Lake. In my constituency, there are three major centres: Big River, Shellbrook, and my hometown of Spiritwood where still today I am mayor as the member from North Battleford pointed out. As mayor of the town, I can frequently see government off-loading onto municipalities. It is getting tough. It is getting to be a point that government, urban and municipal, have to do more for their citizens with less dollars.

I also own and operate a family recreation business. I am a small businessman. I know the problems of small business. PST is killing our small towns. I don't mind going broke if I've done it on my own accord, but I hate when governments share in the breaking of businesses.

I am also, Mr. Speaker, a farmer, and I know the problems of agriculture. The Throne Speech says many farm families are back to depression era incomes. Without much needed income to the farm sector immediately, many farms will fall by the

wayside in the new year. The backbone of this province is first farming and second small business, and neither one is doing good right now. Farmers are going into receivership; businesses are moving to Alberta.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what would the urban population say if income was cut by 35 per cent as was in the agriculture income? There's an old saying: give a farmer a dollar, and he'll spend it in town. Well right now, Mr. Speaker, the farmer doesn't have a dollar, and there isn't much left of the town.

Mr. Speaker, a young man had a dream once, a dream to change the focus of Saskatchewan, to change the direction of government, to make the lives of all brighter, to restore faith and prosperity to all citizens. In order for this to be done, eight courageous men and women formed a party, the party called the Saskatchewan Party. Under the leadership of Elwin Hermanson, myself, and 15 other MLAs, we are now the opposition party, a party devoted to holding the government of today accountable for the decisions they make.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the members opposite to get things straight. We are not called Sask-a-Tories. We are the Saskatchewan Party, a party, Mr. Speaker, that on September 16, 1999, the voters of Saskatchewan gave us 60 per cent of the vote. They were tired of the worn-out NDP policies, tired of the old ideas, and tired of watching the province fall by the wayside. Hope is dwindling for many of the citizens, Mr. Speaker.

Members opposite keep referring to the 15 billion provincial debt left by the PCs (Progressive Conservative). They forget 6 billion of that debt was accumulated by our NDP government to start with. It now sits at 18 billion. Mr. Speaker, you can't keep referring back to the debt. The government has had eight years to do something. What have they done?

We have, Mr. Speaker, the highest taxes, worst job creation, health care beyond repair, education in turmoil, and many, many people leaving our province. Is this what you want your family to grow up and live in?

Mr. Speaker, I am an MLA from Shellbrook-Spiritwood, a large constituency in north-central Saskatchewan. My constituency wanted a voice that will carry the many, many concerns of the region. They wanted the party that had a vision of hope. They wanted the party that will provide a brighter future for their children.

Mr. Speaker, the present government is consistently saying the federal government must help the farmers. That is true, but I also believe the provincial government has a job to do. They must come to the table and help also.

The farmers of my constituency have little or no hope for this government to provide aid. The only good thing about AIDA (Agricultural Income Disaster Assistance) program is the letters A and D, which stands for "accountant's dream."

The government's crop insurance needs to be addressed. Farmers in my area have had crops condemned because of deer manure in the grain. Yet the crop insurance program will not look at their claim or stand behind it. There are other programs

in place but still do not address the agriculture problems.

Mr. Speaker, time is of the essence. This government must address this problem now. Money has to get into the hands of the farmers before the new year. Farmers can't afford all expenses, with the price of grains as low as it is, with fuel prices up, with fertilizer prices up, with education tax up, and grain prices down. The writing is on the wall, Mr. Speaker; farming can't exist at this rate.

The opposition party, in their election campaign, put taxes as the number one priority. All taxes have to be addressed. Saskatchewan, with the highest taxes, are losing out to our neighbouring provinces like Alberta. Most people don't mind paying their fair share of taxes, but we enjoy all services, everyone of us. Everyone must contribute to the pay of taxes. It would be nice if there was no PST in Saskatchewan, but until the time comes, we all must share in the paying of taxes. We all want lowering of taxes. Lowering of taxes creates jobs and stimulate the economy. The government must move on this issue in the next budget.

Mr. Speaker, another key issue in my constituency has to do with forestry and forestry management. Many small time loggers cannot compete with the large machinery operated organizations. Their jobs and forestry business are dwindling. Saw mills are being forced to shut down. Trucking contracts are lost, and trucking firms are moving to Alberta. High fuel costs are also adding to the growing problems.

Mr. Speaker, there are many, many problems in Saskatchewan. Our job as opposition is to bring the concerns to the attention of a government. It is a government's job, today, to try and solve them. People of my constituency, and all constituencies in Saskatchewan, are tired of waiting and waiting for results. The results of the 1999 election proved this. The Speech from the Throne was presented. There are some good ideas in the Speech from the Throne. But it is up to the government — the present government — to implement them and get the job done. Now that we have a coalition government, it will help to get things done if they put their mind to it. Voters need answers; voters need things to be done and done now.

Mr. Speaker, in my conclusion I want to say Shellbrook-Spiritwood put their trust in me to bring forth their ideas and concerns. I will not let them down. I look forward to lively debate with my members opposite. I also want to wish each and every one in this Assembly today a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous millennium year, 2000. Mr. Speaker, I support the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a tremendous sense of awe that I rise to speak for the first time as the new member from the constituency of Carrot River Valley in the heart of the great Northeast. I am in awe of the historical significance of this Chamber and how that history and tradition translates into the expectations that there are of me personally and of each and every one of us here today.

I am also in awe of the almost surreal quality of my personal presence here. I am one of these truly unique — some may say

weird — individuals who've always been involved, interested in politics and government. When I was nine years old, my dad brought our first television set home. My fascination with current events and politics began immediately. The very first major political event I remember watching on this second-hand, black-and-white television was the coverage of the 1968 Liberal leadership convention and the election of Pierre Elliott Trudeau as leader.

I followed that coverage and everything related to it to the exclusion of everything else, to the degree where my dad became concerned because he thought it wasn't normal for a nine-year-old to be that interested in politics and government. As a result of that interest, my goals were a little different than most nine-year-olds. My goals were to participate in the democratic process and to some day serve in an elected capacity. Consequently, Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to serve in many elected capacities over the years, both non-government and government, including three terms as the mayor of the town of Porcupine Plain. When I was first elected, the well-respected publisher of the *Hudson Bay Post-Review*, Al Mazur, now deceased, claimed that after much research he determined that at that time I was the youngest mayor elected in the history of the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — All of these distinctions and experiences contribute to the sense of awe that I feel today. Mr. Speaker, I feel that it is important to thank the people of Porcupine Plain for the overwhelming trust and confidence they have shown me over the years. When my current term as mayor expires in October of 2000, I will always remember how the people of Porcupine Plain, the councillors I have served with, and our town administrator, Barry Warsylewicz, have supported me and contributed to my personal growth.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Carrot River Valley have placed their trust in me to serve as their representative in this Legislative Assembly. I wish to assure all of the citizens of Carrot River Valley that I understand and respect that trust. It is not enough to just say thank you for that trust. That trust must be returned each and every day by representing constituents in a fair, caring, and accountable fashion, and I intend to do just that to the best of my ability.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Carrot River Valley have very high expectations of their elected officials, and I will work very hard to meet those expectations. One of the ways that I intend to meet those expectations is to be a very strong advocate for the constituency of Carrot River Valley. I will bring all of the advocacy skills that I learned in almost 20 years of working with and for people with disabilities to bear in advocating on behalf of the constituency and all constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the previous MLA for Carrot River Valley, Mr. Andy Renaud.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Renaud — Andy — and I, have both

a personal and professional relationship that goes back many, many years. I for one am very glad that Andy had the opportunity to serve in this Chamber because as with me I think that Andy entered public service in order to be able to constructively contribute to improving the quality of life of his constituency. Andy served his constituents with dignity, dedication, and conviction. So on behalf of the constituents of Carrot River Valley, I would like to thank Mr. Renaud for his contribution and wish him and his wife, Sylvia, the very best in their future endeavours.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2000)

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, the constituency of Carrot River Valley is one of the most beautiful parts of this province. Our lakes, rivers, and forests are all part of a natural environment that, even after having lived there all my life, can still take my breath away. This environment lends itself well to many of the growth industries in our province today, such as tourism, ecotourism, outfitting, snowmobiling, summer and winter recreation, and much, much more. The dynamic and progressive communities of Hudson Bay and Nipawin have been particularly successful at developing these industries.

This environment though, as beautiful as it is, can be very demanding. This was particularly true for the early settlers in our area. Every single acre of farmland had to be cleared and for the most part by back-breaking manual labour. From this came two things: a people that have an undying love and very high respect for their environment; and a people who are strong, proud, independent, and fiercely protective of their accomplishments. These characteristics have provided us with the skills necessary to survive in even the most difficult of times.

But, Mr. Speaker, even the tough and resilient people of Carrot River Valley are having difficulty surviving now because this government has neglected and undermined agriculture by tearing up GRIP (gross revenue insurance program), off-loading 60 per cent of the costs of education on the property tax, and the numerous policy decisions made with no regard to their negative consequences on this province's single largest industry, agriculture.

The citizens of Carrot River Valley are having a difficult time surviving because of an oppressive tax regime that chases our young people out of the province, forces our professionals to pursue careers elsewhere, stifles and suffocates economic development, and penalizes our existing businesses to the point where they can no longer grow, or are forced to close their doors.

The citizens of Carrot River Valley are having a difficult time surviving because their services are under attack, particularly their health care services.

Eliminations, reductions, consolidations, amalgamations, and closures have left our communities in a state of shock and fear. One community alone, the town of Carrot River, has lost its rural service centre, SaskPower, SaskEnergy, Highways yard, Crop Insurance, SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and

Resource Management) office, and now added . . . and now to add to that misery, Mr. Speaker, this government wants to close their hospital.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the people of Carrot River are survivors, and they will survive, with the help and understanding of a Saskatchewan Party government after the next provincial election.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, we are all products of our environments and our experiences. As I indicated earlier, for almost 20 years now I have worked with and for people with disabilities, historically — and I believe even yet — the most disenfranchised group in our society.

It is from this experience that I have learned the only way to be successful and to contribute in a productive way is that people must be provided with a level playing field. If people are provided with a level playing field and they are given the freedom to choose, and their dignity and independence is respected, anybody can accomplish anything.

My colleagues and I, Mr. Speaker, respect and believe very strongly in the dignity and independence of the individual. We do not subscribe to the socialist ideology of control and dependence.

Mr. Speaker, I have been asked by the citizens of Carrot River Valley to relay their disappointment with this so-called NDP-Liberal coalition government we have here today.

When I was a little boy growing up on the farm, I always used to hear farmers talk about haywire outfits and haywire fixes. I never understood what that meant, and I asked my dad. Well dad explained to me that because people often were too poor to buy new or proper repairs for broken-down equipment, they would use haywire, which was plentiful and inexpensive. But dad explained these were usually cheap, ugly, and unreliable repairs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the good citizens of Carrot River Valley would agree with me that this NDP-Liberal coalition is a haywire outfit that gave the people of this province a cheap, ugly, and unreliable fix.

Mr. Speaker, on another note, I would just like to take a moment to congratulate Bill Schiller of Carrot River. Bill is, I think, one of the finest craftsmen in the entire country. Out of a small shop in Carrot River, Mr. Schiller and his wife handcraft knives that he has sold all over the world. Recently Mr. Schiller was featured in a North American-wide magazine, *Knives Illustrated*. Mr. Schiller takes a great deal of pride in his work, and I am very proud to have him as a constituent.

On a sadder note, Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention a very dear friend who recently passed away. Mr. Ron Mlazgar of Nipawin was a man of tremendous strength and conviction from whom I was able to draw strength and confidence. Ron had desperately wanted to attend my swearing-in ceremony, but his cancer had progressed too far by then. When he passed away, the funeral was set for the same time and the same day as the

Throne Speech. His family insisted that I should remain in Regina for the Throne Speech because that's what he would have wanted.

So I'd like to say thank you to Ron and his wife, Gai, for their friendship, support, and unconditional love. I wish to pay tribute to Ron in this, my maiden speech to the Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Ron.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the four most important people in my life for all their love and support in everything I do: my wife, Leona; my two daughters, Carla and Krystal; and my son, Tyrell. While I have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, I will wish you and all members of this Assembly the very best for the holiday season.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the motion, but voting in favour of the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To begin my presentation, I want to first of all congratulate you on you being selected Speaker. And I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that without question, there are certain times that rules all of a sudden become muddled, and there's confusion on everybody's mind, in rookie positions. But I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that you have my utmost respect and admiration in your brand new job, and we wish you very well in the future, and we know that you will do well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — I also want to congratulate all the new members. I think you're going to find that this is a very trying time in your life. There's certainly a lot of things that you have to balance, and one of them of course is family, and the other is spare time and certainly work for your constituents and work here.

I also want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And to the new members, I want to encourage you to spend . . . make time for your family and spend time with your family because that's very, very important. And it's a lesson that I learned very, very early in this life as a result of being involved with very good fellow MLAs.

I also want to acknowledge my constituents. This past election was also a very challenging time for me. We had to make sure we went into every community, and Athabasca is the largest constituency in the province. From my home, from my home driveway to this driveway of the Assembly, it's exactly eight hours. And when you travel that distance you get to see the whole province, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker. And I wanted to point out that to have that many people from that far away participate in that sense of sending me back here to be their MLA is something that we'll always treasure. So while I have some certain degree of sympathy with those folks that say they have to travel three to four hours to get here, I want to assure you many people from the North — the member from Cumberland as well as the member from Athabasca — have at least a seven and eight-hour drive respectively to get here. But the North has sent us and they have sent us here to work with

the NDP, and certainly in the coalition, to build a brand new day.

I also want to thank my constituents. I think they are people that have for many years stood by me despite my many weaknesses and despite my many shortcomings. I believe that at times they have looked the other way at some of my shortcomings, and they have again endorsed me. And forever we'll be thankful to the constituents that continue to believe in you even though at times your own belief in yourself is somewhat challenged by the stress, the time, and certainly the rigours of this job.

I also want to acknowledge my family, especially my wife, Becky. She's at home right now taking care of our three children. We have three lovely daughters and they all look like their mother, thank goodness for that. My three children, Michelle, Kellie, and Taylor — Michelle's 15, Kelly is 12, and Taylor is going on to 10 — and all three of the girls, of course, are being raised by their mother since 1988 when I was first elected as mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse and on the road a considerable amount. Without the wife and the three daughters back home I simply would not be able to do the job, and the support that they have afforded me is something that I will forever be thankful for. So to my wife and to my children, I sincerely thank you for your support and ask for your continued patience.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — As well, Mr. Speaker, my number one supporter and my number one person that I always turn to in times of need and times of stress is my father, my father, Leo Joseph Belanger, who was a veteran in World War II. He also served as mayor of Ile-a-la-Crosse, and I have followed in his footsteps, Mr. Speaker, and he is the one that blazed a trail for me. And to point out to my father, Leo, who may be listening tonight, I just want to tell him that we made it here. We're now the cabinet minister, and that there is nobody that can take that away from us. So, hats off to my father, Leo, and certainly to my stepmother who raised us as her own since we were at a young age when we lost our mother.

Also, to my Aunt Rose and my Aunt Sheila and my Aunt Maggie, and my 50 other aunts that took a tremendous load on themselves to help raise a family when we were orphaned at a young age by the loss of our mother. Without their love and without their understanding and compassion, again, we would not be here today to be making this speech in the Assembly. And I think without question that these people did not know if I was going to be a logger, they did not know if I was going to be unemployed, Mr. Speaker. They had no idea I was going to be an MLA. So without them and their unconditional love, again, we want to thank them for their contribution to my life and certainly my family's life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I come from a very exciting part of the province: northern Saskatchewan. It's got pristine lakes. It's got a tremendous amount of forestry opportunity, and it's got a whole pile of tourism potential as well for all the province to enjoy. As I often do, Mr. Speaker, I fly throughout the North, and as you get up to 3,000 feet, 3,500

feet, you can look both ways in the airplane when it's a clear day. And as far as you can see — north, east, west, south — there's just a beautiful piece of land called northern Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, you can travel for an hour, an hour and a half in this plane travelling at roughly 200 miles an hour, and still there's beautiful land out there, and there's just a tremendous asset for the province.

And above all else, Mr. Speaker, the people of northern Saskatchewan also significantly add to the value of the province of Saskatchewan, and I want to pay special tribute to the area I am from, to the people I represent, and also to the aboriginal people in the North that have for many years been very patient with the political process and certainly with their politicians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the non-aboriginal people in the northern part of Saskatchewan that have made the North their home they're most certainly welcome. In northern Saskatchewan, we believe that there is no time for racism. There is no time for doubt. There is no time for self-pity. Mr. Speaker, it's only time to build a brand new North, so the aboriginal and non-aboriginal people are working collectively and in strength to rebuild the North to a world that we both can share and enjoy from.

As well, in the city here, I have often tried to make the city my home. Without the kind support of my fellow MLAs and, on occasion, MLAs from the opposite side, we often sit down and talk, and talk about the challenges of the life. But in particular there's one place in the city here that I want to say hello to. And these staff members and the people at the West Harvest Inn, Mr. Speaker, have actually tried to make the West Harvest Inn my home. They've been very, very friendly folks. They've been very patient and they've also treated me really well as if I'm actually at home. So, I want to take my hat off to Tom, to Shane, Barb, Jennifer, Marion, Kathy, Kelly, and all the gang at the West Harvest Inn for doing a tremendous job of making me feel welcome here in the city of Regina.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2015)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, why did I join the NDP? Why did I believe that the NDP were the best team in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? Well, I'm going to tell you . . . I'm going to take you on a history lesson, Mr. Speaker — a history lesson. We're going to go back to 1991 when the NDP took over the province and they had to make some very, very tough choices, Mr. Speaker. Very tough choices because they were in deficit, they were in debt, and all the mood throughout the land, without question, was doom and gloom, and the future looked bleak.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I went into the archives to check, not the archives . . . but the past newspaper clippings and I went to '91, '92, '93, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98 and I closed my eye and I said, this year — 1994 — this is my choice. That's where my finger went, Mr. Speaker. So I pulled out some clippings. You say any year if you pick out clippings, and I want to maybe mention a few of these clippings, Mr. Speaker. *P.A. Herald*, April 10,

1995, and this is Myron Kowalsky, the MLA from Prince Albert, and I quote:

The advantage of receiving a credit upgrade has several implications. It can help lower the cost of borrowing and fuels optimism in the province's economy.

That was one of the quotes, Mr. Speaker. And this, of course, is the MLA from Prince Albert's weekly column. The second quote he makes:

I find it personally satisfying that Saskatchewan is the first province in Canada to get a credit upgrade in five years (Mr. Speaker). It comes on the heels of Saskatchewan being the first province in Saskatchewan to achieve a balanced budget in several years.

That's one newspaper clipping, Mr. Speaker. That was in '95. February 7, 1995, we talked about the balanced budget, the Throne Speech. That's the headline here, Mr. Speaker. And we're talking about civil servants that went through the incredible pressures of losing many jobs and the tough choices we talk about and the Leader of the Opposition at that time:

Bill Boyd, Leader of the Opposition Conservatives, criticized Romanow's reluctance to consider layoffs of public servants. We should be looking for more efficiencies, Boyd said. No department should be exempt. What they've done in Alberta is streamline government.

And now they're talking about these same problems, Mr. Speaker. And that was from a newspaper article. And I'll go to another newspaper article, Mr. Speaker. This is March 17, 1993. It's done by Randy Burton and I quote:

Saskatchewan's debt is enough to make a billionaire weep. Under the most optimistic scenario, it is going to take decades to pay off the provincial debt.

And, Mr. Speaker, in the same article, they talk about credit ratings. And where is Saskatchewan as a result of the debt, Mr. Speaker? It's near the bottom. Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island — smaller provinces, Mr. Speaker — had better ratings than Saskatchewan did in 1993.

We got that debt, Mr. Speaker, from the Progressive Conservatives of the 1980s. And I will go to another quote, Mr. Speaker, 1993, May 15. And the quote here is:

Saskatchewan's rating was lowered because of the province's continuing high debt load.

And the other quote, Mr. Speaker.

Tax increases and capital financing needs of the crown corporation sectors are two reasons — DBRS gave for the downgrade.

And, of course DBRS, Mr. Speaker, is the Dominion Bond Rating Service. However, Mr. Speaker, a further quote goes:

The company praise the government's attempt to reduce

the deficit (but added) it would be difficult for Saskatchewan to stay on track.

And that, Mr. Speaker, was a direct reference to the debt left by the Tories of the 1980s.

And a lot of people in the province, throughout the province, have always said we are tired of hearing the debt problem. Well, Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers — the taxpayers — are tired of paying that debt. We've said that time and time again.

And I'll go to another quote, Mr. Speaker. This goes from *The StarPhoenix*, May 27, 1993. Again, Mr. Speaker, again optimism is slowing growing and quote:

Because of the strong, demonstrated commitment to deficit reduction outlined in March's provincial budget, Premier Roy Romanow said he's encouraged by the affirmation because it's so . . . budget projections are accurate and realistic. Opposition leader, Rick Swenson, was less enthusiastic. I guess it's good, in that at least people can see some results for all the taxes.

And that was their best response from their leader at that time, Mr. Speaker.

And again, February 24, Mr. Speaker, 1994, *The StarPhoenix*, 1994, the headline is "Credit rating agencies seek positive signs in Saskatchewan." And the place I want to talk about Mr. Speaker, the particular quote here. And it goes:

Eugene Williams, a financial analyst with the Canadian Bond Rating Service said any time a government deficit follows a downward trend it's a positive signal. They've done a fairly remarkable job. The effort is there, and the conviction has held up, and the fruits are slowly coming to bear. But that being said, we still have to do our due diligence.

He was speaking about the NDP's effort, Mr. Speaker, the control of debt and the control of deficits.

And another article, Mr. Speaker, 1994, March 8, again the headline reads "Saskatchewan gets good marks. Budgets have impressed bond-rating company." And again the headline has further information lower down. It says:

The Canadian Bond Rating Service reaffirmed the province's credit rating at A but improves Saskatchewan main outlook to stable from negative. And A rated government bond is considered by CBRS (Canadian Bond Rating Service) to be of good quality. It's the first senior government to be afforded a stable outlook rating.

Said Eugene Williams again, a financial analyst with the Montreal based CBRS.

Mr. Speaker, there's time and time again. Time and time again, Mr. Speaker, we have headlines from the early '90s — '93, '94, '95, '96 — about the tremendous job, the tremendous job that's being done in terms of managing the debt and paying down that debt and handling that deficit problem created by the Tories in the 1980s.

And, Mr. Speaker, the news continues. This is today's paper, I believe. This is *The Globe and Mail*, Monday, December 13, 1999; that's today. And the headline says "Who supplies Canada's trading muscle?" That's the question. And you would figure . . . let's see, is it Ontario? Is it Quebec? Who is it? The quote:

New Brunswick and Saskatchewan are the only other provinces whose reliance on exports exceeds the national average . . .

What that says, Mr. Speaker, is we're on the right track.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And it goes about the diversification efforts, Mr. Speaker . . . the second quote goes:

Six of the 10 provinces ran international surpluses. Ontario and Alberta kicked in the biggest chunks, followed by Saskatchewan . . .

And that's today's *Globe and Mail*. It's a national paper, Mr. Speaker, talking about the diversification efforts of Saskatchewan. That diversification efforts, Mr. Speaker, was a direct result of us taming the deficit, reducing our debt, and investing those proceeds into our economic thinking.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, not only has this government tamed the deficit, Mr. Speaker, that oftentimes we forget those people that made tough choices on our behalf, the people that aren't here today. Some of the people that went on to other lives and other careers, some by choice, others by not. However, Mr. Speaker, those are the people that we should take our hats off, those people that have sat in this same Assembly and sat in many other rooms making tough choices, and now today we're beginning to see some of those tough choices bear fruit for Saskatchewan and its future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, we also have here the Mid-Year Financial Update for 1999 and as always we want to share this information with the opposition, and it says, "The sixth consecutive balanced budget on track." That's the headline, Mr. Speaker, six balanced budgets in a row.

Mr. Speaker, we're balancing the budgets, we're paying down debt, and we're improving Saskatchewan's economy. Is there any more that we can do? Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, there is more that we can do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — So I want to give, Mr. Speaker, this to one of the pages to take over to the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party and show him this is good news. This is good news. Saskatchewan's on track, Mr. Speaker. We're not going to blink; we're not going to deviate for silly politics. We're on the right track. Let's keep on going.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — So, Mr. Speaker, one of the points we want to make is that this party has a history of making some tough choices. We don't go out there and sell fear.

Mr. Speaker, we have balanced budgets, not so much with my involvement — I've only been around for a short while — but the many people that have been here before me. We take our hats off to them. These are the people that are the true warriors of the fight against the deficit and the debt that the Tories left to us in the 1980s.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And I implore the Saskatchewan people to have a long memory as some of the people talk about. Have that long memory. Have a long memory because you've got a long ways to pay the debt, and we got to pay it. Nobody else but we got to pay it.

And, Mr. Speaker, tough choices, balanced budget, the debt's going down, and what else have they done? What else has the NDP done, Mr. Speaker? They have cut taxes, not as fast as some people would like, Mr. Speaker. They have cut the PST. They've cut corporate tax. They've cut income tax. They've cut all three sectors, Mr. Speaker.

And that's what I mean: is there any more that they can do? And the answer is, yes.

Mr. Speaker, it is a brand new day. A brand new day is dawning. It's a brand new start, but I implore the people of Saskatchewan to not forget those people that have come before me and have come before other people in the Assembly in fighting that debt. And I can tell you now, making decisions affecting our lives is a very tough business to do.

And those people now that may be sitting at home watching TV, tired, burnt-out, beaten up — those are the people that won the battle, Mr. Speaker, and again my hat goes off to them in recognition of their fine work.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the overall debt went from \$15 billion in 1991, left by those Tories, and now, Mr. Speaker, it went down to 11.4 billion, Mr. Speaker. Almost \$4 billion less, Mr. Speaker, \$4 billion less. Now is that a tax break, or is that a tax break, Mr. Speaker? \$4 billion less in nine years, that's an incredible record, Mr. Speaker.

The overall debt's going down. The overall interest on an annual basis, Mr. Speaker, went from \$860 million each and every year that this government paid, goes down to \$725 million, \$725 million. That's a \$135 million more that we got to spend on education, on health care, on highways, and the list goes on because the list is great, Mr. Speaker.

Now there's a bet going on within, within the coalition caucus. We are not sure whether our debt and interest will drop faster than the Saskatchewan Party.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — With all due respect, the Deputy Premier's a nice guy and he's saying, well we'll all support the Sask Party. They'll probably drop but not as fast as our debt, because he's an optimistic person. But being a political person that we all are, the rest of our caucus said no. The Saskatchewan Party are going to drop faster than our interest and our debt rates.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2030)

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I also want to say that there are challenges ahead for this government. Without question the election dictated that. We understand that, and we humbly take that message on the chin. However, we understand that the challenges ahead include the farm crisis. That's number one, you know, and being from northern Saskatchewan, I look around me and I got a preacher behind me and a farmer next to me, so we got a lot of preaching about farming going on in this caucus. And I'm beginning to learn a lot about the agricultural crisis.

But what I do know, Mr. Speaker, is I was very proud to take part in the day when the farm groups sat in this Assembly and they spoke about some of their challenges, about the unpaid bills and some of the pessimism in terms of the future of their children, their farms, and their livelihood. And much of that, much of that message, Mr. Speaker, is the same message that the northern people have been expounding on for many years. And the northern people have said, there Buckley, that's where we can relate to some of the problems associated with the province, is that farmers will get our support.

So the northern Aboriginal people all over northern Saskatchewan are saying, we back the farmers up 100 per cent. We want to see a fair system for them as we want a fair system for us. And I can tell you right now sitting here in that historic day, Mr. Speaker, I felt very proud to be part of the NDP government that helped make that happen, and give the farmers an opportunity to express to all of us, Liberals and NDP, and yes, even the Saskatchewan Party, the so-called Saskatchewan Party, give them the opportunity to hear first-hand of some of their struggles.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the agricultural sector, to the farmer, we feel your pain, we share your pain, and we also want to share your work and share the effort to rebuilding Saskatchewan as a whole. And that's the message from the northern Saskatchewan people, the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal people.

And, Mr. Speaker, some of the other challenges we have is educating for the new economy, and I believe the coalition government's going to do that. And folks back home asked me, what's your impression of the coalition government, Buckley? You think it's going to work? And I said this coalition government's going to be judged on its success, not what the Saskatchewan Party says or any other columnist says. It's going to be judged on its success, Mr. Speaker. We have two quality cabinet ministers involved in this coalition government and it's going to work, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — The other part of the equation, Mr. Speaker, and something I know the Sask Party has a difficult time with, is we have to increase the aboriginal participation in the economy and into the fabric of Saskatchewan.

Without question, Mr. Speaker, without question, what was the primary . . . what was the primary message, Mr. Speaker, of the provincial campaign of 1999? The primary message was the Indians are going to pay tax. That was their message. Or if it wasn't Indians paying tax, it was the welfare rolls are climbing. If it wasn't the welfare rolls are climbing, well our youth are out of control.

Mr. Speaker, that's unfair to the province; it's unfair to the aboriginal people. All these issues are going to be discussed in a good, solid environment built on respect. We're not going to cheapen the process using politics for our own political efforts. Mr. Speaker, That's unfair.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — You're doing more damage, you're doing more damage to the fabric of Saskatchewan when you try and divide the people. It does not work. You unite the people, bring them together. Bring them together on a table of respect and of admiration. You don't say, well he's getting away with a free ride, let's get him. There is no free rides in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

The First Nations people and the Metis people all pay taxes. And I'll go so far today as to challenge the Leader of the Saskatchewan Party that I probably pay more taxes than he does. And that's the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. It's every Aboriginal person in the province does contribute to this province in an economic sense and a social sense and certainly in the cultural sense as well.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, I want to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, you go back to the year that Quebec was having their vote. Quebec was having their vote, Mr. Speaker, on the future of this great country and there's 80,000 northern Quebec Cree — 80,000 — of which 90 per cent of them voted to stay in Canada. Ninety per cent of them. And you do the numbers, Mr. Speaker. They won . . . the yes . . . the no side won by 50,000 not to separate from Canada — by 50,000. It was a close, close vote, the most historic vote in the whole country's history.

And, Mr. Speaker, think about that. Who put them over the top? Who put them over the top? It was the 80,000 Northern Quebec Cree, the First Nations community that said "yes, we believe in Canada and, yes, we'll back up Canada". And that, I think, is the fundamental contribution that the Aboriginal people make to our province, make to our cultures, and makes to our country. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, we got to do more and more in terms of trying to respect that whole process of sitting down and talking to each other as opposed to cheapening the whole environment with petty politics.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network), the launch of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network is going to do a tremendous amount to narrow that gap of misunderstanding. It's going to happen. The renaissance as mentioned in the Throne Speech is going to happen. There's going to be a reawakening, a rebirth of the Aboriginal people, and I think it's best that we embrace that and build up on that and bring them on in so that we can all build this great province and this great country together.

Mr. Speaker, in sports as well ... (inaudible) ... what everybody and every kid's dream is to make the NHL (National Hockey League). Well in the NHL, the contribution of the Aboriginal community includes Sandy McCarthy, Gin Odjick, Ted Nolan, Theo Fleury, Reg Leach. And then we have other folks that played junior hockey, Louis Gardner, Abe Apsis, August George. The names are not familiar, Mr. Speaker, to most people, but they are familiar to many young people who don't look at that individual if he's native or non-native or Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. The guy can play the game — let him play. And that's the message to the Saskatchewan Party when it comes to the arts, to politics, to business, the Aboriginal people can play the game — let them play.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — So, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the efforts being taken by the Aboriginal people in our province and throughout our land, and I'm very proud of the New Democratic Party for reducing our debt, reducing our taxes, and enhancing our services. That's going to continue. I'm very proud of the coalition government that's going to be adding the coalition partners, that's going to be adding to the whole process. They all have value. We even have some of the ideas — some of the ideas coming from the Saskatchewan Party. Well this is all about amalgamation of good ideas towards a common vision.

And what lessons have we learned, Mr. Speaker? What lessons have we learned? These are the ten lessons that we've learned, Mr. Speaker. Number one, we encourage, or I encourage, every Aboriginal person in the Province of Saskatchewan to exercise their right to vote. I implore you all to rise up and exercise your political power so that other people cannot make a difference in your lives, but you can make a contribution to theirs.

First Nations, Metis, non-status, Bill C-31, and off-reserve people — they can all have a direct impact on the Saskatchewan political direction. And I urge every Aboriginal people to get out there and exercise your right to vote because it's worth a lot in this world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, this government has a proven track record; it has a history; it has a vision. The Saskatchewan Party has got to admit that. Now the older ones will not. The more seasoned veterans will say no, no, no, no.

But to the new members, I share with you, as I once sat in opposition, there is going to become a time, sooner than later,

that you will be told, don't ever say that in public. Or the other part is, don't agree; your role is to disagree. Or the other phrase is, our plan, which is no plan, is better than their plan.

Mark my words, the backbenchers, the young players in the Saskatchewan Party, you will see the direction we're going is the direction of common sense. It's being inclusive of all people, and it's got a vision attached to it. And sooner or later you're going to admit, deep in your mind, that this is the plan for Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, the third lesson is the amazing thing about politics — and that's what I find really amazing — is that these guys put us in debt and now these guys are telling us how to spend our money. The last advice on money matters cost Saskatchewan for the next 30 years, but thanks, but no thanks, for your advice.

Number four. In the past nine years, Mr. Speaker ...

An Hon. Member: — Eight, eight.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Eight years, nine years, this government through the taxpayers, have paid over, or close to, \$7 billion in interest payments. Seven billion, Mr. Speaker — \$7 billion in interest payment alone. Now you think about the tax breaks that \$7 billion could do. You think about the highways, the health care, the seniors' support that 7 billion could afford this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, above all else, think what 7 billion could do to help the farmers out right now. That could re-energize the whole province — 7 billion; it's 7 billion, Mr. Speaker. We could have a long-term agricultural safety net for the next 10 years. But thanks to the debt, thanks to the interest, we have to work within our means, Mr. Speaker, and we're doing all that we can.

And, Mr. Speaker, number five is Saskatchewan is the province that I chose to serve. And we often hear the Saskatchewan Party talk about Alberta, and Alberta has this, Alberta's done this, Alberta's cut their taxes. Well I think, Mr. Speaker, if you love Alberta so much, move to Alberta.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — But Saskatchewan people want us, the Saskatchewan people want us to rebuild this province. This province just west of Alberta, you guys ... I meant east of Alberta, just a tad east of Alberta, just a tad west of Manitoba, that's where Saskatchewan is, you guys. This is our province. This is our home. This is where you fix the problems.

If you want to live in Alberta, live in Alberta but when you're in Saskatchewan, you talk about Saskatchewan dreams, Saskatchewan ideals, and Saskatchewan plans — not Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — And, Mr. Speaker, I say to you that

we're only here temporarily — all of us are only here temporarily. And I know that eventually that I will go home back to the North and live in Ile-a-la-Crosse. My challenge is to try and bring lasting, positive change to the North, for the people of Saskatchewan, and to mankind. That's my role here.

But I can assure you I know, I know this is not for life. I know that I'll be going back home. And I'll be going back to do what I have to do with my own folks to rebuild the North as best I can in that capacity.

The seventh point is, Mr. Speaker, is being part of this NDP team and the coalition also reminds me of the message, the message of tolerance. And the message of tolerance that I have to all the people that may be listening is this: there's no time in our lives, as I mentioned, for racism, doubt, self-pity, and all the other evils.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — There's only time, Mr. Speaker, there's only time to encourage our children to challenge life in every arena life has to offer, be it in business, politics, the arts, and life in general. And I believe our job here is not to trivialize the political process by name-calling and pointing in direction of an Aboriginal group. I believe that the greatest challenge that we all have is to meet the challenge of allowing our children — native and non-native, Aboriginal, Chinese, the whole shebang — is to allow our children the freedom, the freedom and the peace to dream. That's our number one goal, Mr. Speaker.

And the eighth lesson I've learned, Mr. Speaker, is that this party has always and will always admit its fault. Time and time again, Mr. Speaker, we have heard, yes there's always room for improvement. This party does that. And I believe, in simple terms, admission of a fault is the greatest attribute of leadership; we made a mistake; we'll try and fix it. That's the general position, if it's fixable. And, Mr. Speaker, I think without question, that's a lesson that we've learned being part of the NDP team.

Number nine. With your plan, with the Saskatchewan's Party plan, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to use a former colleague's phrase. You can cook it . . .

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

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — I request leave to make an introduction, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Kwiatkowski: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mr. Ken Rauch up in your gallery. Gentlemen, as I indicated in my speech, I've worked almost 20 years with people with disabilities. Ken is a community program consultant with community living division of Social Services, an agency with which I had an excellent working relationship, and particularly with Ken. I welcome him here tonight.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

(2045)

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to ask for leave to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

Hon. Mr. Cline: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to introduce also Ken Rauch who happens to be a constituent of mine, but frankly I was so captivated by the speech of my colleague that I was unable to get on to my feet. But I do welcome Ken to the Legislative Assembly as I know all will, and I'm sure he's here to listen to the member from Athabasca. And I'll sit down so that he can continue with what I think is one of the better speeches, Mr. Speaker. But I'd like the members to join with me in welcoming Ken Rauch.

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.

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm saying again, Mr. Speaker, with your plan, the Saskatchewan Party plan, and I'm going to quote one of my former colleagues:

You can cook it. You can bake it. You can microwave it.
You can shake 'n bake it. You can fillet it. You can fry it,
but it will never, never, never add up (Mr. Speaker). It
never will.

And I want to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, that without question, we have the best record, and certainly in my view, Mr. Speaker, not because he appointed me in charge of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management), I believe we have the best leader, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Our Premier's been through the ringer on a number of fronts, Mr. Speaker, but I want to make one very minor point is that he has put everything on the line in the recent crisis facing the agricultural community. He has put everything on the line for this province of Saskatchewan — not Alberta, not his personal aspiration — but for Saskatchewan.

And I want to point out that on behalf of the Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan, especially the Aboriginal people of the North, we want to thank you for appointing us and having confidence in this whole process of appointing myself as Minister of SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management). We will do a good job. And I also want to point out, Mr. Speaker, he did not appoint me because I was Aboriginal. He appointed me because I was Aboriginal.

And I believe we have the best leader, the best plan, the best vision. And I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that they are not the government-in-waiting. We are the government that is not waiting, Mr. Speaker.

The Assembly adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, therefore, it is very important that I stand up today and talk about this pamphlet, *A Brand New Day*, the Speech from the Throne.

Today marks the beginning of a new voyage with new eyes, new vision, and a fundamentally new government. It talks about families; it talks about young people; it talks about rural families; it talks about health care; it talks about an open, accountable government; it talks about self-reliance for Aboriginal people; and it even mentions Camsell Portage, Mr. Speaker, the smallest community, the furthest north community. About 30 people live there and they are inclusive of Camsell Portage and the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker.

They also talk about other priorities — about police officers to protect their communities; it talks about the forest, a review of the no-fault auto insurance. All these plans, Mr. Speaker, talk about admission, a weakness in certain areas, and vision of others.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I thank you for your time and your indulgence, and to also again take my hat off to my former colleague and the guy that was handling SERM for a number of years, Mr. Lorne Scott. Of course, Mr. Scott's done a tremendous job. Amongst all his department staff he was very, very respected. There was a lot of admiration and a lot of the staff, when you mention Scott's name, would certainly light up with excitement and certainly enthusiasm and they admired Mr. Scott. So on behalf of the staff of 1999 and myself as the SERM minister, I want to thank Mr. Scott for his contribution and certainly the many hours he spent trying to rebuild some of our attitudes towards SERM and hopefully in the future some of his work will bear fruit.

So again in closing, Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for your time and I implore all folks, let's be inclusive — north, east, west, south, non-Aboriginal, Aboriginal, rural, urban, because I'll tell you, we have a million people and as CBC says, a million people, a million stories. We can rebuild, Mr. Speaker, if we have respect. Thank you so much.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Axworthy: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very much looking forward to making a speech in response to the Speech from the Throne, but due to the late hour, I'd move adjournment of the House . . . of debate, I'm sorry.

Debate adjourned.

Hon. Mr. Lingenfelter: — Mr. Speaker, I move this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — Before I announce the adjournment, I wish everyone a very pleasant evening. This House now stands adjourned to 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

