

EVENING SITTING

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Motion No. 10 — Rural Economic Development

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope the members opposite have enjoyed my opening remarks, and now I will proceed with the body of my speech, the main body of the speech.

I was speaking about a very interesting project in my constituency of Redberry Lake, the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve, and I was just outlining all the very interesting natural features of this world-class biosphere, and I was proceeding to say what a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) world biosphere is.

And the biosphere is a centre of excellence for sustainable economic development, and Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve is managed by a community committee comprised of elected officials from the participating municipal governments and community boards operating as the Redberry Regional Economic Development Authority. A biosphere reserve is an internationally recognized centre for excellence and a resource for conservation, research, and education.

Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve provides an opportunity for high-quality research into the impacts of global, regional, and local environmental change in human activity. This work is coordinated by a technical committee.

Designation as a biosphere reserve is a highly honoured status. Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve is part of a worldwide network of UNESCO — of some 375 locations, only 10 of which are in Canada. Redberry was one of the two designations for Canada in the decade leading up to 2000, joining high profile Clayoquot Sound in BC. There are also biosphere reserves in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta. Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve is the only one in Canada that resulted from local grassroots effort, a matter of great significance to UNESCO.

Now the Saskatchewan minister of Environment and Resource Management signed the UNESCO nomination for Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve in 1999. Now the question asked by the people of Redberry Lake and Blaine Lake and Hafford and the area is why Saskatchewan should financially support the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve's research, education, and public information facility.

UNESCO designations are a matter of pride for all, for the other provinces where they exist. They are supported accordingly. UNESCO decides what will be designated based upon input from the jurisdictions. It is suspected there are some officials within the government's departments and agencies who would have favoured another area as UNESCO site, and they have either failed to do the groundwork necessary to obtain the status or UNESCO has rejected their proposals because they have failed to meet the very strict criteria. The government and the people of Saskatchewan benefit in a large measure from the existence in the province of a UNESCO designated biosphere

reserve through enhanced profile for tourism to the province and the tax revenues deprived therefrom, enhancing opportunities from the high profile and credible environmental research.

And the provision of a internationally connected educational resource, the sustainable development, proximity to Saskatoon as I mentioned before — its university and research facilities, its tourism businesses — further enhance the opportunities available to that city in particular.

In order, Mr. Speaker, for the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve to provide the services to the province and its partners in research, education, and tourism, it is important that one facility that serves all those particular goals is able to be open and available to the agencies, schools, and the public. Commitment by the provincial government towards a facility will enable the province to have input into the character and substance of research activities carried out there and to lever additional federal funds to assist with its agenda.

Mr. Speaker, providing funding assistance and a core of annual funding to the operation of a facility does not set a precedent except possibly for other, as yet undesignated, UNESCO sites within the province. However, the province maintains control over future designations and therefore over funding commitments in the future. This designation is not present within any other municipal groupings, nor does it involve any other municipal, regional, provincial, or national park or facility.

Now the accomplishments of this very innovative, forward-looking development in Redberry Lake constituency, the citizens there are working hard to get rural Saskatchewan working again in that area. Since 1989 the local society that's taken the lead in tourism and conservation development for the Redberry Lake communities has been the Redberry Pelican Project. It has undertaken a number of community and tourism development activities, some locally based and some directly benefiting the entire province.

In addition, it has helped . . . it has developed and maintained a first-class resource centre at Redberry Lake, which is being used by a large number of agencies, educational groups, and researchers in conservation and tourism, as well as countless visitors to the province.

Some examples of accomplishments: developed a major catalogue library of monographs and ecotourism development, acclaimed by some researchers as the best in Canada. Developed Internet camera systems to promote ecotourism in Saskatchewan and Western Canada. Initiated the follow-through and the development of an ecotourism accreditation system for Saskatchewan. The first of its kind in Canada as far back as 1992, it is still herald as an example of best practices in the industry. Obtained international important bird area designation for the lake and its watershed. Twice awarded the Tourism for Tomorrow highly commended award in 1992 and 1999 by British Airways in recognition of the society's contribution to tourism best practices in raising the stature of tourism to the province's natural areas.

The founder for the society was awarded the Conservation Award by the Governor General of Canada in 1992 for the same reasons — obtained world biosphere reserve status for the community. And the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve was dedicated by the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Saskatchewan in November 2000.

Mr. Speaker, this revitalization in the Blaine Lake-Hafford area would like a little support from the provincial government. Funding has been withdrawn by the provincial government only in the last year or two, and it was desperately needed just to keep the interpretative centre open.

What they are wanting to do is hire a coordinator. The job description of a biosphere reserve coordinator for the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve, the position would assist to conserve biological diversity, promote research and monitoring, and assist the community committee in a variety of scientific, cultural, education, and development agencies to develop the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve as a model of sustainable development in the service of the communities and the people of Saskatchewan and Canada.

The coordinator will also facilitate co-operation and exchanges at regional and international levels; specifically maintain the Redberry Lake Interpretative Centre for the use of school groups, the general public, the partner agencies under the direction of the committee; conduct and coordinate the development and delivery of interpretive programming to school groups and the general public under the direction of a community committee; assist at meetings of the community committee and its five standing subcommittees as follows: (1) culture, research, and education; (2) economic development; (3) health and social well-being; (4) equal system research and conservation; and also (5) agriculture.

Also assist research partners through coordinating logistical support; assist in the preparation of partnership proposals; maintain accurate records including visitor statistics and partnership project records, and other activities under the direction of the community committee.

That, Mr. Speaker, is an example of a local initiative, the communities getting together to revitalize their economies in their particular areas. And all they're asking is for a small amount of funding which has been withdrawn in the past two years to open an interpretive centre and to help expand the initiative at the Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve.

And that is one example, Mr. Speaker, of a Grow Saskatchewan plan where ecotourism is considered valuable, where we have great potential to expand in that area.

I'd like to go on now to number eight of the Grow Saskatchewan plan and building a strong social partnership for growth — a strong social partnership between business, labour, government, and First Nations focusing on growing Saskatchewan. Irish economic miracle relied heavily on a strong social partnership with all the major stakeholders in the country.

The key to economic renewal in Saskatchewan is something we have always been pretty good at — co-operation. We need to

build a strong social partnership between business, labour, government, and First Nations focusing on growing Saskatchewan. The so-called economic miracle in Ireland relied heavily on a strong social partnership with all the major stakeholders in the country. Saskatchewan could gain much from following the Irish lead in this regard and the result would be a stronger, more prosperous province.

The game plan for growth, Mr. Speaker — new capital investment is the key to job creation and economic growth. A growing economy and a growing population of productive, taxpaying people will rebuild the tax base necessary to invest in our communities and deliver high-quality health, education, and social services within a balanced budget. So this is a summary of Saskatchewan Party's game plan for growth.

New investment is a key to economic growth and job creation and the growth of our province by 100,000 people in 10 years. A growing economy and a growing population of productive, tax-paying people will rebuild the tax base necessary to invest in our communities and deliver high-quality health, education, social services within a balanced budget.

Game plan for growth — the Saskatchewan Party's game . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. The member appears to be using extensive use of quotations. I would like to bring to his attention from page 152 of Beauchesne's sixth edition, item 496, this item:

A Member may read extracts from documents, books or other printed publications as part of a speech provided that in so doing no rule is infringed. A speech should not, however, consist only of a single long quotation, or a series of quotations joined together with a few original sentences.

So I'd ask the member to adjust his remarks accordingly.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was at the end of the Grow Saskatchewan presentation, and I felt it necessary to tell the members opposite of the Saskatchewan plan to grow Saskatchewan and how that fits in with rural revitalization — our plan to grow rural Saskatchewan, hand in hand with labour, business, the Aboriginal community, urban and rural Saskatchewan, working together for the good of the whole province.

Getting back to the Redberry Lake reserve, it's interesting. That's just one example of many where the provincial government has spent millions of dollars, \$20 million to be precise, in Atlanta-based dot-com. And just think of what could be done if just a small portion of the investments outside this province and country were put towards economic revitalization in rural Saskatchewan.

We could apply it to keeping the cost of having a second phone line or a third phone line for businesses in this province kept down. Right now, it's a very, very extraordinary high cost of putting of the cost . . . or that's being charged to businesses who want to put a second line in. Over \$9,000 for a second line, and we feel that the money that's being spent in other countries, in other areas of the world should be applied to economic growth in this province.

And it's interesting to note through the whole long-term home care fee debate, finally the government did back down after incredible pressure from the citizens of this province, but it's interesting to note the Premier's remarks saying that if they cannot find the money through savings or for increased tax revenue, they are going to take that \$7 million this year and \$14 million next year out of the Highways budget. And again, it seems that every time the government does something, it's to punish someone else, and in this case they're going to punish rural Saskatchewan again by not developing the highways as quickly as they should be and could be to help rural revitalization.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is one more item that I want to discuss, and it comes up again and again in our Grow Saskatchewan meetings and phone calls to the office and in person on a regular basis. And the one thing that people of Saskatchewan say, how to revitalize rural Saskatchewan, how to get this province going, is to do one thing, and that's for this government to call an election and have this government thrown out of power so that we can get on to the job of growing Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Weekes: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move:

That this Assembly expresses its dissatisfaction with the province's lack of commitment in bringing forth real and effective policies that would have a positive impact in bringing about rural economic revitalization in Saskatchewan.

Moved by myself and seconded by the member from Estevan.

Ms. Eagles: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand in this honoured Assembly and on behalf of the constituents of Estevan to second the motion put forward by the member from Redberry Lake.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who is directly involved in agriculture and someone who lives in the rural area and loves that way of life, Mr. Speaker, speaking on rural issues is a matter that is very near and dear to my heart. Mr. Speaker, just this last weekend my grandchildren were out at our farm, and they were exploring every place imaginable, leaving nothing untouched or unturned, and I mean that in a literal sense. And my husband learned very quickly that when he set a wrench down when he was working on some machinery that it just so happened that that would be the wrench that they needed to fix their pedal tractor or their bike or whatever. So he soon learned not to drop anything, but they were certainly enjoying their stay out at the farm as well.

(19:15)

But bless their hearts, Mr. Speaker, to them and their worry-free world. That is the ideal world. And, Mr. Speaker, to anyone involved in agriculture, if you can just put aside the concerns that plague you — the cost of chemicals, fertilizer, machinery payments, land payments, taxes, and on top of that, the low price you receive for your commodity — the way of life is a

perfect life.

Even with the situation in agriculture the way it is today, Mr. Speaker, the farmers are out there passionate with that way of life and the profession they have chosen, giving their machinery the final inspection so that they can plant their crop and hopeful of a bountiful harvest.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard and are very well aware of the subsidy wars that are taking place and I'm sure no one likes subsidies. But what are farmers to do? All they want is a level playing field so that they can compete with the Europeans and the Americans. The Europeans heavily subsidize their farmers. Perhaps it is because in some European countries the people once went hungry and the governments have vowed that that will never happen again. So they look after their farmers, which leads us to the Americans who realize that their farmers cannot compete with the Europeans. So what do they do? They subsidize their farmers. And it may be for political reasons, Mr. Speaker, but they do subsidize them.

But here in Canada we have an arrogant and uncooperative federal Liberal government who just doesn't care about anyone or anything west of the Ontario/Manitoba border. Previous Liberal prime ministers have told us in no uncertain terms to sell our own wheat. The present Liberal Prime Minister, Mr. Chrétien, makes sure that Bombardier is looked after. That's all he seems to care about. In his world, Canada has only two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, and as long as they are looked after — those two provinces — he's assured of a re-election.

It's interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that when the member from Shellbrook-Spiritwood and Saskatoon Idylwyld and I were down in Nebraska recently, senators were told there that that state alone, the state of Nebraska, would receive \$1.2 billion in payments from the United States — one state. And that was before this recent farm Bill was passed. And that amount is almost what we in Western Canada are asking for right now, and at this point unsuccessfully.

Mr. Speaker, while I believe that the issues of subsidies are a federal issue, I must say that I was very disappointed with the actions of the members on the government side when the Leader of the Opposition asked for leave to debate the issue of Saskatchewan hosting a meeting of Western premiers to debate the subsidy issue. Now, Mr. Speaker, when the opposition leader requested leave, he was turned down by the government opposite not once, not twice, but three times.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are other issues that this NDP (New Democratic Party) government has control over. They have and are hurting our people that are involved in agriculture. And I'm talking about the new, enhanced crop insurance program. Higher premiums, removal of spot loss hail, and the cancellation of the property tax rebate program. So you really have to ask yourself, Mr. Speaker, do they, the people over there, really care?

Mr. Speaker, when the farmer suffers economically, so does the whole community. Farmers aren't buying vehicles or machinery. They can't make a living, so they pack up and leave. Then the local grocery store and hardware store suffer. And of course, Mr. Speaker, when he and his family leave the

community, it affects school enrolments, and right now in my constituency we are facing school closures.

So what we have, Mr. Speaker, is a government that just doesn't have its priorities right. They have changed the crop insurance program and cancelled the property tax rebate program, but on the other hand they have millions of dollars to invest in Georgia and Tennessee, 28 million lost on SPUDCO (Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company), and the list goes on.

The ethanol plants would be a very bright future for diversifying our province, but of course now we have the government playing the game they are so famous for, picking winners and losers, which should make the self-appointed instant authority on agriculture, the member from Regina Qu'Appelle, very happy because there's nothing than makes him happier than to have the government control and/or ownership in every area of this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, if we take a trip down memory lane — and I know the members opposite shouldn't mind this because they do it all the time — we can go back to the '70s when we had Allan Blakeney. And his government had the land bank, and thank goodness this program was dismantled in the '80s, or we would have been a province of state farms.

Again Allan Blakeney ran up \$6 billion of debt with an interest rate as high as 24 per cent, Mr. Speaker, and at that rate the debt doubled every four years. This had a very crippling effect on the rural sector and indeed every other sector of this province.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government, which fortunately won't be around after the next provincial election, is also the government that tore up the GRIP (gross revenue insurance program) contracts in 1993 — tore them up, Mr. Speaker, with a promise of bringing in a long-term safety net. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is now May 2002, and guess what? The agriculture producers of this province are still waiting for this long-term safety net. This government has no idea, no plan, and after the next election, they won't have any worries because none of them will be there.

They support the monopoly the farmers are forced to market their grain boards . . . their board grains through, and the unfortunate part is that they really haven't a clue as to what the consequences of this monopoly are. On our farm, Mr. Speaker, we have been growing mostly non-board grains for the past 10 years. It has been our only hope for survival.

Just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, during estimates, the Minister of Northern Affairs was talking about value added in the forestry industry. He said it didn't make sense to ship our raw timber when we could be finishing it here. And yet in the grain industry, we have said that very thing countless times, only to see the barriers remain in place that prevent things like pasta plants from happening. Those of us involved in agriculture naturally think this is senseless to ship out our durum, paying the freight on it, then having the finished product shipped back in the form of pasta, in this case, and again having to pay the freight. Why not process it right here and have a value-added product, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, someone once said farming is the only industry where you buy everything in retail, sell

everything wholesale, and pay the freight both ways.

Mr. Speaker, with the present government we also have seen a huge exodus of people, people in their productive years packing up and leaving the community and in many cases, Mr. Speaker, the province. And as I stated before, Mr. Speaker, this affects school enrolment.

We also have to realize that this is the same government that closed 52 rural hospitals with their wellness plan. This led to people with health problems, particularly seniors, leaving for larger centres so that they would be closer to a facility.

This government is also responsible for closing the Plains hospital, the most modern facility in or around Regina. This hospital was built for the people of southeast Saskatchewan. It was convenient for the people to get to. People in my area felt that this was a direct attack on rural Saskatchewan.

The recently released ACRE (Action Committee on the Rural Economy) report told us that the government has put out the welcome mat for investors. We must create an environment that is business friendly. Governments need to create the climate, provide the incentive, encourage the development, then step out of the way. We do not need a government that competes with the private sector with the taxpayers' dollars. Too much of this has been happening in the past and the bureaucratic red tape must also be eliminated.

During our Grow Saskatchewan meetings people constantly told us that our tax base must be broadened. The tax burden on the people of this province was more than they could bear.

Our plan is to grow the province by 100,000 people in 10 years. ACRE recommended that the province needed to grow by over 200,000 people in 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Redberry Lake who preceded me outlined the points on how the Saskatchewan Party will grow the province, and I know the members opposite were listening very intently — probably so that they could try and initiate some of our ideas as they have done before.

Our plan, Mr. Speaker, is a very bold one but it is a doable one. People say that we all must change our attitude. That being said, Mr. Speaker, I am very optimistic about this province and I believe in this province and the people of this province. It is just the present government that I don't have any faith or confidence in.

And I'm not the only one, Mr. Speaker. Here's what some of the other people are saying about this government. An economist for StatsCanada says:

The implication of such a loss — sooner or later you stand to lose your hospital, school, or hardware store. The result in Saskatchewan's case has been an exodus to the cities and out of the province.

The head of a Saskatchewan Crown corporation says rural Saskatchewan residents shouldn't blame outsiders for their own problems. No wonder people say that those in government have to change their attitude. We've just heard that again a couple of

weeks ago in the ACRE report, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It's very unfair that the head of a Saskatchewan Crown corporation blames the rural people for their own problems.

And here's a letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I'm going to read, and it says the "NDP bus tour is too little too late." And it goes on, and I quote:

I would have to say . . . that Walt and his cast of Disney characters that (are on) this current NDP bus tour across Saskatchewan is pitifully embarrassing, and thankfully the time has come to return the bus before they totally humiliate themselves, if they haven't already done so.

The most amazing aspect of this farce on wheels is how you people actually managed to find anyone to shake hands with on your 10-second whistle stops across Saskatchewan.

The people of rural Saskatchewan are a lot more intelligent than this government gives them credit for. The comments of one of (the) . . . Moose Jaw MLAs sums it up the best when it was said: "We're finding things we never knew . . . before." My question is: where have you people been living? If it takes you people boarding a bus for rural Saskatchewan to find that out, then we're all in a lot of trouble. If this government was truly serious about reconnecting with rural (Saskatchewan) and small town Saskatchewan, then you should have been taking it on the chin, facing people in communities that have had their schools and or hospitals closed . . . (and) addressing this province's ever-growing list of disasters.

I'd like to have seen more meetings with town councils and rural councils so (that) you can see and hear first-hand how they are struggling to provide (the) basic infrastructure and services to their ratepayers and the list could go on and on.

And then it ends by saying that . . . the writer puts:

. . . support for this government is sagging like wet boxer shorts (Mr. Speaker).

And other headlines say how the:

Pessimism is stunting Saskatchewan agriculture growth.

Farmers want less talk, more action from the Premier.

Uncertain future for small towns.

And of course, we get into the rural water needs testing, and we all know about the problems that we've had with the water, and the problems in North Battleford really brought this to light.

We have problems with the infrastructure. Many communities are hauling water, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the federal and provincial governments initiated a program for dugouts, and that money was gone before many of the applications were even processed. Some people were denied . . . their application was denied for the simple reason that they started their project before the government approved their application.

So that's very unfair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they're out there trying to make a living and need water for their cattle, and just for their farms and the small communities, and the arrogance of the provincial and the federal governments in denying them.

And then it . . . we go on here to:

NDP cabinet tells rural politicians that there is no money, the government is broke.

And a little later on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we realize that this government has spent money on a dot-com in Atlanta, Georgia, to the tune of \$20 million. And how must that make the people of this province feel when this government will invest in people outside this province, but do not have the confidence of the people of this province to invest in them.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's another letter I'd like to just read you portions of here. And it's a writer that . . . from the rural area and says:

There are a lot of negative feelings about Saskatchewan, especially rural Saskatchewan. We are at the bottom of the priority list. As much as many of us believe that a small community is the best place to live and raise our children, today that is a difficult task. Our governments have cut funding to schools. School divisions are amalgamating, schools are closing. Funding cuts to health care, hospitals close, health divisions amalgamate, less personalized care, longer waiting lists, decreased services. Rail lines closing, grain elevators closing, less taxes to help our small communities. Increased trucking in our already crumbling highways. No funding for repairs so turn our highways back to gravel.

And she goes on to say that:

We are a small business, yet we are run by higher powers who tell us where, how, and for how much we can sell our product.

We cannot increase the price of our product to meet the standard of living, and the rising cost of expenses.

And this writer goes on to say that her:

. . . community pride and spirit is very alive and very strong. Every individual who has grown up a part of a rural community will tell you how proud they are of their roots (Mr. Deputy Speaker).

And she says:

I am . . . proud (to be a) Canadian. I have a lot to be thankful for in my country. Our country is known to be ever so giving. To others. I feel many of our leaders have forgotten that they need to look (at) . . . number one first . . .

Our positive feelings and pride in rural living continue to be kicked in the face.

How long can we continue to keep our small towns alive? To keep our schools open? More of our businesses from closing? More families from moving? How long before we are just a page in the history book, like so many other small communities?

Negative feelings? Yes. Pride and spirit? Always.

And that is basically the attitude of the people in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Despite the adversities and despite the attitude of this government, they are still very positive and they go out and try and keep their chin up when really a lot of them don't know how they are going to survive the spring, how they are going to put their crops in. Farms that have been in the families for generations and they are just at the point where they don't know if they can survive.

And you know . . . and then another headline says that the government shouldn't be surprised if farmers are suspicious and that is so true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one point that was very interesting is that — when I read this — and that's people aren't happy that their friends, neighbours, and children are being forced to leave the province to find a job. They're frustrated because while health care waiting lists are growing and highways are crumbling, the NDP has done nothing but spend money on out-of-province investments and grow the size of government.

And then here's the effect of the population loss. It has a significant impact on the people who chose to remain in Saskatchewan. It means a smaller tax base, less money to pay for important services like health and education, and that's why it's so very important, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, excuse me . . . that we turn these numbers around and start to grow this province.

And in the Wednesday, January 16 edition of the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, it's got here:

The NDP has a perfect track record in job uncreation.

And it talks about the continuing evaporation of jobs. And it says:

The government's response does not reflect the sense of urgency that you might expect when the province is bleeding out. Instead of leadership, we get excuses.

It's beyond our control, says Economic Development Minister Eldon Lautermilch. The job losses . . . reminds us, are mostly in the . . . (ag) sector, afflicted by drought and low commodity prices. In other words, we're to hope for rain and (a) \$5 a bushel for wheat.

This isn't a job-creation strategy. This is a cross-your-fingers-and-hope-for-the-best strategy.

It's what you'd expect from children and gamblers, not (from) a provincial government.

(If) the NDP under Premier Lorne Calvert seems to have a problem with governing. (And) I defy anyone to think of

anything really decisive that this government has done in the year since Calvert took over.

An Hon. Member: — That's a quote, isn't it?

Ms. Eagles: — Yes. Yes, it is a quote.

Yes, he went on a rural bus tour. That created a job for the bus driver.

And I will end the quote with this part, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

To pull Saskatchewan out of this death spiral will take dramatic and creative measures. If the Calvert government isn't up to the job, it should resign, and let someone else have a shot. We cannot afford another year as disastrous as . . . (the) last one.

And with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased to second the motion put forward by my colleague, the member from Redberry Lake.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the conclusion of my remarks tonight . . .

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I started to say, at the conclusion of my remarks tonight I will be moving an amendment.

But I want to start my remarks by talking about the numerous things that this government has done in an attempt to rebuild rural Saskatchewan. And I also, I also would like to indicate to the members opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the depopulation of rural Saskatchewan and the change in rural Saskatchewan didn't start in 1991.

I can remember in 19 . . . 1980s, Mr. Speaker, when former Premier Grant Devine thought of a grand scheme of taking thousands and thousands of civil servants from the city of Regina and putting them in small rural communities. In fact the Department of Highways was divided into nine communities around the small community as the hub of a wheel.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he was at that time trying to find a solution to the issue of rural depopulation.

And it's a problem that has been there since the 1950s or longer, Mr. Speaker; that in fact, the shift from a rural population, where family farms were on best a section of land, to where we are today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where many, many farms are in fact corporations in nature; that they farm what used to be farmed by 15, sometimes 20 family farms is farmed by a single farm today in some cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So the problems facing rural Saskatchewan didn't occur in the last eight or nine years; they've in fact been generations in developing.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, without doubt when the agricultural

community in Saskatchewan is hurting, the province of Saskatchewan is hurting. And the last few years has seen some difficult times in rural Saskatchewan in the agricultural community. That nobody is denying. But those are challenges that are not created internally within the province either, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

International subsidies by the European Union and the American national governments are not, and I stress, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not internal problems to the province of Saskatchewan. But yet their impact is very clearly a very serious negative impact on the province of Saskatchewan. Nobody denies that.

The fact that we've had several years now of very low commodity prices has significantly hurt the agricultural community in Saskatchewan. Nobody can deny that.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last but not least of the major problems we've faced in the last couple of years — the extreme drought. Nobody can predict an extreme drought and there's no way that a government can in fact make it rain, can make it change, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So throughout history, throughout history our agricultural producers have faced drought. They have faced challenges.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everyone on this side of the House clearly understands the challenges that are facing the people in rural Saskatchewan, and we do care. But those challenges cannot be changed overnight. And we're a province of limited resources.

We're a province that has more agricultural land in grains and oilseeds than any other province. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have close to 50 per cent of the total production of grains and oilseeds in Canada in this province. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's very significant for a province of 1 million people.

But despite the challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government's moved to try to solve some of the problems in rural Saskatchewan. I want to talk about some of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and some of the things that this government has done.

First, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to talk about the fact it was this government put forward the ACRE committee, a committee that was made up of rural residents, farmers, business people whose challenge was to go and put together a blueprint for the redevelopment of rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that committee has just recently reported. And that committee came back with a single most important issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and a single most important set of directions that we must all heed. And it was this: there is no option but change. Rural Saskatchewan on its current path cannot succeed. That we must be open to change and in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must be willing to lead that change.

And change is very difficult, Mr. Deputy Speaker. People are always reluctant to move from what they know, from what they understand, and from what they feel comfortable with, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I want to talk about just a few points, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's not that rural Saskatchewan has not experienced profound change over time — it has. We've seen significant diversification of crops; we've seen significant change in our agricultural community. But what have we learned from that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It's that that diversification and change in itself is not enough to sustain a viable agricultural community in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It means that we must look for value added, we must look to ethanol, and we must look to new industry in rural Saskatchewan in order to make it sustainable, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Those same changes have created significant challenges of employment opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. As we move from smaller farms to larger farms — and the members opposite would understand this, as well as the members here where many of us were born and raised in rural Saskatchewan outside the major cities — as we've moved from the family farm into larger farms there's been a significant challenge of employment in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nobody will deny that. With the lack of employment in communities in rural Saskatchewan we've seen a depopulation of communities. We've seen younger people moving off the farm into our highly populated areas. Again a significant challenge.

In order to change that trend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to create base industries in those communities that keep young people there and provide jobs for young people in those small communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But yet rural Saskatchewan has some unique strengths that can be tracked back to our heritage, to our early development as a nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are considered among the most capable, most energetic, and in fact an employable group of people that delivers more than any other nation in the country or any other nation in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have a work ethic second to none. And that goes back to our heritage, our development on the farm, and in fact the work ethic that we learned as children.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite all the challenges in rural Saskatchewan, I think we have to acknowledge that one of our best assets and most basic assets, fundamental assets of our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is our large land base and our agriculture base on that land, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a significant part of our province and a significant part of our future.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also are the home of some of the richest resources in Canada. We have great fresh water throughout the province, far better than in many other jurisdictions in this country — in fact far, far better than many jurisdictions in the world.

We have clean air. We have abundant sunshine. We have a very diverse wildlife and landscape, and we have as yet some significant untapped resources that we are just starting to discover today.

But above all, we are the home to resilient, hardworking, innovative, and determined people, particularly in our agricultural community. These are the qualities of our

ancestors. These are the qualities of our children. And they are the qualities that will bring this province to its rightful place in the future.

We recognize the challenges that were faced in rural Saskatchewan, but we also recognize the opportunities. And what we need to do is get beyond talking about the challenges and move to doing and delivering in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we're starting to do in the ethanol industry.

We're going to move forward in that industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite the opposition's reluctance to have foreign investment capital in the province of Saskatchewan. We have heard the minister repeatedly, repeatedly say we're moving forward in this industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Recognizing our challenges and our strengths, we have done many things to try to stimulate the rural economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And later in my speech I'm going to talk about literally hundreds of things that have been done in rural Saskatchewan in the last decade to stimulate the economy. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are literally hundreds of things that have been done to stimulate the economy.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must say that again . . . once again that it was this government — this government — that established the Action Committee on the Rural Economy because we believe in rural Saskatchewan and we believe in the people of rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

By listening and talking to the people of rural Saskatchewan, the ACRE committee has put together concrete, tangible ideas for creating jobs, and stimulating rural communities and jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker — tangible things that need to be done, and we need to move forward with this. The opposition continues to want to put down rural Saskatchewan and talk about how we can't do anything, we can't move forward.

(19:45)

Well if we're always talking about how we can't do something, we'll never do it. We'll never do it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we always talk in the negative about how bad everything is, that's what people hear. That's what investors hear. That's what our children hear. How do you move forward in that environment, Mr. Deputy Speaker? You cannot move forward in that environment. In order to move forward, you need a positive attitude, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And even those who have ambition to once govern in the future, if they say so many negative things about the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the bright things they think they can do, they're going to go nowhere. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you don't think positive about your province, if you don't talk positive about your province, you'll have a self-fulfilling prophecy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you cannot move ahead if you don't believe you can.

And the opposition continues to talk about the negative things about our province. For once, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd like to hear them talk about positive things about our province because this is the province where the most dynamic, motivating, intelligent people in this province live. We have entrepreneurs.

We have hard-working people, and we have a bright, bright work history in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we have a bright future. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite don't want to hear about good things; they're leaving the Assembly. It's unfortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the province put together an economic blueprint called Partnership for Prosperity last year, or two years ago, that identifies the revitalization of rural Saskatchewan as a priority of our government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we took that seriously, and that's why we put the ACRE committee together, the Action Committee on the Rural Economy. But we believe very, very sincerely about the importance of rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The challenges we face today as a province and as a people are the same as those our ancestors faced more than 50 years ago and 100 years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To successfully overcome those challenges will require different tools, a different way of thinking, and a willingness to overcome those hurdles, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This province has always faced adversity and challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we've always moved to overcome them and build our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and only through a positive attitude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will we be able to do that. We have the resources. We have the people. We are assembling the tools needed to build a 21st century economy in this province. Now we just have to have the willingness to tackle those tough challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and move us forward.

And I know the members on this side of the Assembly have . . . they have that attitude to tackle those challenges and move us forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I only hope the members opposite will become part of moving forward instead of talking about moving backwards, and in fact always talking about the negative things about our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk for a few minutes about some of the specifics in ACRE. ACRE, the Action Committee on the Rural Economy, and the creation of the Rural Revitalization Office are manifestations of this government's commitment to rural Saskatchewan. They are actions. We committed an office of Rural Revitalization. We committed . . . we put together ACRE. We committed to ACRE, we put it together, and we made it happen. Those are commitments towards rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We want to see results.

As indicated in the 2002 Throne Speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, part of the government's action plan to work with community and business groups is to reduce obstacles to rural economic development. Giving rural residents access to the same opportunities urban residents have is a priority of this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's why we're continuing to expand both Internet and cell phone access to people in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I heard the member from Redberry Lake talk about how that they need more Internet, cell . . . pardon me, increased cell coverage in rural Saskatchewan for economic development. Well this government is doing that.

But at the same time, at the same time I heard members on the

opposition side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, talk about how they don't know if they want to own Crown corporations. They don't know if they want to make investments so we can expand coverage to rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is only through prudent investment that we can continue to do those types of things that put rural Saskatchewan on an even foot with urban Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this government is moving to do that. We're expanding cell coverage throughout the province as we can afford to do so. It is only through good, prudent investment that our Crowns like SaskTel can actually afford to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

ACRE is really a blueprint for the future. We have to accept it as that. We can't accept everything in it as being absolutely gospel because over the next two or three years things are going to continue to change. But it is a blueprint to move forward to revitalize rural Saskatchewan and we need to recognize it as that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what are some of the things this government has done in the last while to help get people in rural Saskatchewan thinking about moving in new directions? Because most importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's important to get people in rural Saskatchewan to believe you can move forward to build a rural economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And members opposite keep saying no over there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's because they don't believe we can move forward in rural Saskatchewan. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government does believe that we can rebuild and revitalize rural Saskatchewan, and we can in fact move forward to the people in rural Saskatchewan.

We organized, recruited and organized . . . recruitment and organization of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Annual Fall Conference was part of moving ahead. Getting people to think about what you can do in revitalizing rural Saskatchewan; get people together to talk about what they can do, what they believe in, and how we can move forward.

As well, the organization of the Rural Economic Opportunities Conference. Again, get rural people together talking with optimism about moving forward in rural Saskatchewan. A very important thing to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We decreased the cost of phone service from SaskTel — the local businesses in rural Saskatchewan. As well, as I've mentioned previously, expanded the cell phone coverage in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Very important things to the infrastructure of building a rural economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We put CommunityNet into communities. It's a growing development of IT (information technology) infrastructure in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has already been linking numerous communities together throughout rural Saskatchewan, and by 2003, CommunityNet will connect more than 366 communities. And over the next three years it will link 834 educational facilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 310 health facilities, 86 First Nations schools, and 256 government offices in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Significant movement to putting rural Saskatchewan on the same foot as

urban Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to talk about one of the significant movements that we've made over the last few weeks — six to eight weeks or so — since we've announced the ethanol development in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, considering the state, the current status or state of our agricultural sector, this government can see the importance of a vibrant ethanol industry. It's very, very important that we develop a vibrant ethanol industry. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I heard the members opposite earlier, as we went through a debate on the issue of ethanol, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard them say that they didn't want private investment from outside Canada. Well we need to have money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to build an industry. And we have to accept that money from those who are willing to bring money forward to develop an industry. Many Saskatchewan industries were developed with money from outside Saskatchewan and outside Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the most significant social program in Canada today is a job. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the most significant social program today in Canada is a job. And that's very important, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Is this government supposed to sit by and let an opportunity pass us by if industry that's building a viable ethanol industry in Saskatchewan wants some government commitment and public investment?

If they want it, are we supposed to let it pass us by because those major companies want a portion of government investment? I say not. I say we have to build rural Saskatchewan for those people. We have to build it for the people of Saskatchewan. We have to build it for those families that are waiting for help.

We cannot sit idly by, waiting for solely private investment if those companies willing to put money into our province insist upon a portion of public investment. We will not sit by. This government will act. We need to act in the interest of the people of Saskatchewan.

Rural Saskatchewan does not need a government that uses wishful thinking as a policy platform. What it wants is decisive action and leadership to move forward on the plans to an objective to build an ethanol industry in rural Saskatchewan. That is what it wants; that is what it's demanding today. And this government is going to move forward with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Rural residents want investment in their communities. Where it comes from is not a primary concern. They need that investment in their communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I'm going to talk a little bit about tools for development in Saskatchewan and how they affect rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now we're doing a number of things as a government to develop rural Saskatchewan, and I think people need to understand that and we need to talk about it because we can't always talk about the negative.

Granted, there are significant challenges in rural Saskatchewan today. I'm not going to pretend there are not significant challenges, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The challenges we face because of depressed agricultural markets, depressed agricultural products, international subsidies in the grains and oilseed sectors, drought, and depopulation of rural Saskatchewan, are significant. But they are just that — they are challenges. And challenges need to be met head-on.

Now what's the government doing? We've put an investment attraction council together, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to pursue partnerships and seek out new businesses for Saskatchewan. And in particular, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we'd like to seek out new businesses for rural Saskatchewan to build a vibrant new economy in rural Saskatchewan.

Tax reforms, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've provided simple, fair, and competitive taxes that support opportunity and growth. In 2001 Saskatchewan residents will pay \$317 million less in provincial income tax. This is the largest personal income tax cut in this province's history and there will be further reductions in this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker — significant cuts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2001 we had the single largest investment in highways. Again, that is the infrastructure of rural Saskatchewan, largely. This year again we have a significant \$300 million commitment to highways in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those highways don't . . . they run up to major cities, but what they do is they provide transportation routes for the goods and services provided the people in this province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite say we're forgetting all about their highways. But to rebuild the highway structure in Saskatchewan — we have more highways than any other province in Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker — takes time. We're doing it, Mr. Deputy Speaker; the members opposite know that.

You know, three years ago, every single day in this Assembly, there were significant questions about highways, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This year there are no questions, there are no complaints. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's because we're doing . . . we're rebuilding the highways infrastructure in this province and that is a significant investment for rural Saskatchewan. That's a significant investment for the future of rural Saskatchewan.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite have difficulty that we're spending money in their communities and in their RMs (rural municipality), Mr. Deputy Speaker. But we're doing it anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a necessity to build the road infrastructure in our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a Strategic Roads Partnership Program with rural RMs. We have a Prairie Grain Roads Program, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with \$29 million in it.

We have Telehealth being developed for rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I can go on and on and on about some of the things we are doing to enhance the opportunities in rural Saskatchewan.

We have technology enhanced learning that now brings education to many smaller communities that wasn't there just a short period of time ago, Mr. Speaker. We have a virtual on-line campus that we're developing; we have CommunityNet; we have creation of the Prairie Ventures Fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker — all things that are helping rural Saskatchewan.

We've put REDAs (regional economic development authority) in place. We have investment in new research and technologies to create new opportunities in rural areas. We have the Agriculture Development Fund, we have the Agri-Food Equity Fund, we have Strategic Investment Fund; we have the Livestock Loan Guarantee Program, Mr. Deputy Speaker — all designed to help rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now I'd like to talk for a few minutes about some of the success stories in rural Saskatchewan, because there are many. There are many. Not that there aren't challenges out there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But there are also significant success stories in rural Saskatchewan.

I want to talk about a few in southern Saskatchewan to start with. Popowich Milling Limited in Yorkton is a good place to start, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a company established as a farm-based seed cleaning plant in 1980 by founder Terry Popowich. The company expanded in 1998, opened an oat processing plant as well as a bagging and distribution centre and manufactures a variety of milled oat products, including organic oats, and exports more than 75 per cent of its products to the US (United States) and Mexico, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A success story in rural Saskatchewan, providing not only a market for products grown in rural Saskatchewan, but also an export market for those products.

(20:00)

With recent purchases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the staff will increase from 70 to 82, and production capacity will triple to 100,000 tonnes by the summer of 2003.

Now even the members opposite would have to acknowledge that's a success story. That's a Saskatchewan company with the entrepreneurial spirit of a Saskatchewan resident building an industry in rural Saskatchewan that uses the products raised in rural Saskatchewan. That can be nothing but a success story, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to talk a little bit about Conserva Pak Seeding Systems of Indian Head, with Jim Halford as the founder, and employs between 20 and 49 people. Produces about 60 seeders a year. Seeders have been sold throughout Western Canada, the US, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Another success story in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Then we have Bridgeview Manufacturing. Employs up to 70 people and the plant has over 17,000 square feet. It manufactures custom trailers, livestock handling equipment, and grain handling equipment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again a manufacturing industry for our primary agriculture industry in Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A success story in a rural community. What more can we ask for?

By the way, just as a point of interest, Kevin Hruska,

recognized in 1997 as the Entrepreneur of the Year at an awards ceremony in Calgary, the founder was recognized as the Entrepreneur of the Year in 1997. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's the spirit of individuals like Kevin that have built this province.

Fill-More Seeds Inc. in Fillmore. Employs 16 people to process lentils, peas, and chickpeas. Cleans and bags them and then ships them to markets in Mexico, Europe, and African countries, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A significant, significant investment in rural Saskatchewan.

In July 2001 the company purchased Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevators in Creelman, Osage, and Fillmore which are along CPR's (Canadian Pacific Railway) Tyvan branch line. The company accepts CWB grain, Canadian Wheat Board grains and non-board grains, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Investment again in rural Saskatchewan and a very significant investment.

Husband Foods in Wawota, Mr. Deputy Speaker, — another investment in rural Saskatchewan, a significant success story. Well Mr. Deputy Speaker, that particular business in rural Saskatchewan is an organic farm.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have literally 140 success stories in rural Saskatchewan. Now I'm not going to deal with them all, but I do want to . . . I don't have time, Mr. Deputy Speaker and in a short period of time that we would have, I could not get to all of them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a shame because I think the people of Saskatchewan need to understand that we have many, many success stories in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about some of the recommendations from the Action Committee on the Rural Economy. It talks about access to capital. People in rural Saskatchewan need access to capital to grow a vibrant, new economy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government's committed to help them access that capital. We've established an Agriculture Venture Capital Fund — end up stimulating new capital. Invest in large farm-related and value-added agriculture — a good move for rural Saskatchewan.

We're in the process of establishing an ethanol industry. I want to talk a little bit about the government's actions to date, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We've established a Prairie Ventures Fund. We have had Economic and Co-operative Development as a reviewing programs for promoting community development in rural Saskatchewan. Economic and Co-operative Development offers a Small Business Loans Association program, and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food are examining options to the Livestock Loan Guarantee program to allow it to provide additional options for livestock feeders in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have the rural skills development program, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Actions to date are significant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now I could go on for some hours about the recommendation on the committee, the ACRE Committee, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the members opposite can read the report. If they really are interested in rural Saskatchewan, they could read the report, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And they could go out to their constituents and talk about the good work that was done by the ACRE Committee and that we

need to move forward, and we need to move forward united. And we need to have a belief that we can move forward and we can accomplish something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because without that belief and that faith in a future, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have a self-fulfilling prophecy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you don't move forward. And now is not a time to talk. Now is not a time for political opportunism. Now is the time to move forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about some good news stories in rural Saskatchewan from newspapers. You can just go through the headlines in paper after paper. "Making wooden pallets a growing venture at Zenon Park," Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I can go on and on and on, through article after article, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about rural Saskatchewan. "Canola production centre will produce economic spinoff in Nipawin." And there are good stories throughout rural Saskatchewan talking about economic development, day after day after day.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we don't hear about those things from the members who represent those constituencies in rural Saskatchewan. All we hear about is the doom and gloom and that things are so bad in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is no hope or opportunity for the future. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's what they want people to believe, that there is no future in rural Saskatchewan.

But the members on this side of the House, the majority of who were born and raised in rural Saskatchewan, really do believe that there is a very bright future in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we believe that there are very good people, people who want to build their communities, grow their communities, want to invest in their communities for the future, and want to live, and in some cases, Mr. Speaker, they want to die in those communities as well. They want to go to their final resting place where they've lived their entire lives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House believe that if that's what they want to do, they should have the opportunity to do that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that spirit of optimism for the future of rural Saskatchewan — and in fact the future of our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker — an optimism that I hope the members opposite catch and I hope they start to believe in rural Saskatchewan as much as the members on this side of the House do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and believe in our future and the opportunities for the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You have to be pragmatic; you have to move ahead with what's possible to do. You cannot dream about the impossible, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You cannot have Utopia, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You must move ahead pragmatically, taking the challenges that confront you, and move into the future as it presents itself to you.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that, I'd like to move:

An amendment by removing all words after "Assembly" and replace with the following:

express its support of the province's commitment in bringing forth real and innovative policies that will have a positive impact in bringing about rural economic revitalization in Saskatchewan.

And this amendment is seconded by the member from Saskatoon Idylwyld, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to start my remarks by a wise saying by a very wise man. Thomas Edison once said:

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.

Our own Minister of Agriculture and Food and Minister Responsible for Rural Revitalization used this quote to make the point that we here on this side of the government are committed to working to improve the conditions in rural Saskatchewan. He was speaking to the 2002 Saskatchewan Rural Economic Opportunities Conference, March 20, 2002.

It was interesting when we had the people from ACRE here presenting the ACRE report. And they were asked, what is the number one concern or what's the number one thing that we could do to improve rural Saskatchewan? And they talked on and on about attitude. And so I thought I'd read a little bit about, what are some of the success stories in rural Saskatchewan? What were they talking about? What was ACRE talking about, rural projects that went really well?

Well here's one from Meadow Lake. And if you believe in success, it will become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Here's Meadow Lake, a community 150 kilometres north of North Battleford, doing very well. Now what's been the primary driver? Forestry. And they've worked really well. This group, it says in the report, they've made very good use of MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and MPs (Member of Parliament).

What's the number one thing that they talked about that's so important? A positive attitude:

Meadow Lake has a positive self-image and a positive attitude. The optimism has become infectious. Even when Clearwater Mills closed recently (and I'm quoting here) and 70 jobs were lost, it did not have a negative impact. People looked at what else could be done. They are confident in themselves and convinced their community will continue to grow and prosper!

Here's another situation — Tisdale. Tisdale, Saskatchewan. And the heading is, "Success begets Success. It's not easy, but it's that simple!" And here's a community that created opportunities: "The most dramatic growth came during the 1997-2000 period when four inland grain terminals were built." And this helped the community create a synergy that led to so many other things.

But what was the one problem they had to overcome? What was the one roadblock? Negative attitude. In here it says, I'm going

to quote here:

Despite the successes over the years, by individuals and the community, the pervasive dark cloud of hopelessness seems to hover over the community. The tendency to view rural communities and agriculture as victims of government, big business or foreign subsidies is self-defeating. This is reinforced, on a daily basis (Mr. Deputy Speaker), by both external media and in the coffee shops.

And the solution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is:

Leaders have consciously recognized that attitude is a major barrier to creative problem solving, change and adaptation.

And I see that in this House when we're constantly asked questions that have a negative overtone.

Effective communication is critical to presenting an alternative message of hope and optimism that characterized the pioneers that settled and developed the community. This also involves a supportive and effective local media that is in tune and in support of innovation and growth . . . and prepared to take an alternative view to the provincial or national media on the local economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, here is another example. Leroy: "Thinking Outside the Box — Changing Times — Can We Change in Time?" What was one of their issues that they felt about road blocks? . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Well, pretty close. This is one thing they . . . I'm quoting here:

Pettiness and jealousy of success can provide road blocks or split a community.

Here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have in our member statements good examples of things that are going well in our province, and yet we seem to not be able to celebrate them. So what's the solution? And I'm quoting here:

The solution was good communication and an effort to provide benefits to a large number of stakeholders in every project so that everyone could win.

And not just some.

Here's another example of a success story in Saskatchewan — Eston — and the headline here: "Re-define the Term Community!" And their aim, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was to make Eston a showcase rural community. I mean, what was their roadblock that they talked about? Yet again — attitude. And here I quote:

Attitude: "What's the use?" or "It can't be done!" There is a great deal of frustration and pessimism in rural communities, including parts of Eston. This attitude comes from years of decline, less infrastructure, more consolidation and increasing taxation pressure on local government for education and municipal services. (And I'm quoting.) It's really a feeling of powerlessness.

And here, this is what Verna Thompson says. Verna Thompson says:

In some ways, our own community can be our worst enemy, and further decline becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But what's the solution?

Strong groups of leaders who support each other to keep positive. Ignore the naysayers. Do enough background work to get people to work with you. Unless the general attitude is positive, nothing will happen. Do not be afraid to try new things. Failure is required to learn because you never know unless you try.

(20:15)

And here in this side in the government, we're willing to take a few risks. We've got a plan, especially using the Crowns. We take . . . We have a process in place to make sure we're doing things with due diligence, but there are risks and we have to take a chance, and we want to support our people in rural Saskatchewan.

Manitou Beach, yet another example in the ACRE communities of success. "Pie-in-the-Sky Community Development. How the Community Created Opportunities." We all are aware of Manitou Beach was a resort community and really had a great and economic miracle. It's a wonderful place and what is their roadblock that they talked about? Community skepticism — it can't be done. This was a major challenge particularly in the face of massive agricultural and rural crisis in the mid- to late-1980s.

And what was the solution, Mr. Speaker? The solution was involving successful business people in the core group who already had a sense of the market and intuitive ability to sense what the community would support.

Now here is another example, Mr. Speaker — Ogema. And what's the heading here? "We simply choose to opt out of rural decline!" Now Ogema is a small village, was incorporated in 1910. Its population though is increasing from 290 to 320 the past two years. But the wake-up call for Ogema came in 1995-96 when the closures of SaskPower office, the CP (Canadian Pacific) branch line, and the local elevators combined with the impending loss of the school. This became a call for action.

And what was the turnaround? Well the Red Coat Road and Rail Ltd. and at the same time the South Central Hog Group formed to look at a community hog venture. And these were great success stories.

Now what did they say were the keys to success? Well in Ogema, they talk about the government must be a partner. And I quote here:

Once the community was organized and focused on action, there was good support from government staff and researchers for both the Red Coat Road and Rail (Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation and the

Canadian Wheat Board) and for South Central Hog (Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food), which helped make these projects successful. This help was in terms of information, trends, regulatory compliance, access to politicians and policy adjustments.

So here, Mr. Speaker, are I believe six examples: Ogema, Manitou Beach, Eston, Leroy, Meadow Lake, and Tisdale. They talked about how important a positive attitude was to make things happen in rural Saskatchewan. Without a doubt there is a need for policies. And I want to talk about one policy, one initiative, that I think is very promising and very important in terms of diversification, and that is the Farm Family Opportunities Initiative.

Now why has the government announced the farm family opportunities program? Well, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farm families need our support. Many are faced with having to adjust their business to rapidly changing environments, and our agricultural industry and our rural communities need the leadership, the dedication, and expertise of our farm families. And this program assists farm families to manage change through business management advice, training, and support programs.

Mr. Speaker, what are the program components? Well there's basically three parts to this. The first is a farm business advisory service to assist farm families to analyze the current state of their farm enterprise, diversification assistance program to provide financial assistance to defray some of the costs of changing or diversifying, a training skills enhancement program to assist farm families to access advice in the training skills development required for implementing their action plan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, who can apply? Well all farm families can apply for the farm business advisory service. This program really is targeted at farm families whose net incomes from all sources are below 30,000 — a three-year average — and a net worth of less than 400,000.

Mr. Speaker, can farm corporations apply? Of course they can. The farm corporation has the same status as a farm family unit.

And what benefits does the program offer? Well there's essentially two benefits: a 25 per cent or up to \$5,000 of the capital costs associated with farm diversification or expansion, and up to \$2,500 for education assistance to help farm families access training and skills development.

Now can you have both? Yes, you can. The maximum support per family is \$7,500.

Now is there a program available to assist producers to purchase livestock? Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is. It's the livestock loan guarantee program. And currently there is 120 associations in the province accessing this program.

Now this one is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Can I receive assistance for a non-farm diversification project? Yes, as long as the development occurs on the farm. And some of these examples are a bed and breakfast or a meat processing facility, and this could be covered up to a maximum of \$5,000.

Now how do you start? Well you contact the business agrologist in your area for an appointment. And that's really I think a neat . . . a very important initiative to support rural families in our province.

Now I just want to talk just a minute about the six interim recommendations that ACRE asked because they felt were very, very important. And I think it's important that we recognize that we've done these things. They thought these were the important points to get going right away before they handed in their final report. So this is important to realize that we are moving on the ACRE report.

The first one, Mr. Speaker, was access to capital. And what's government actions to date? The Prairie Ventures Fund was created. A venture capital established by 18 Saskatchewan credit unions, Prairie Financial Management and CIC (Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan) were to invest in Saskatchewan business. And this fund, Mr. Speaker, is expected to raise up to \$60 million in capital over the next five years.

Economic and Co-operative Development is reviewing programs for promoting community development. All right. Economic and Co-operative Development is offering small business loans through the Small Business Loans Association program.

The second point they ask for — rural skills development program. And what are we doing on that?

Well the Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training has increased access to education and training opportunities to people in rural Saskatchewan through technology enhanced learning initiatives. Through this program, people in rural Saskatchewan can expect an increased range and diversity of courses and programs available at a distance and more opportunities to develop technical skills required by today's labour market.

Regional colleges are helping. And they're also talking about a Saskatchewan older worker in agriculture pilot project. And this project is still in its early ages and it's a very important thing . . . (inaudible interjection) . . . Yes.

And then I was just talking about the farm family opportunities initiative. Another important point.

The third one was the approval process guide for development projects. They felt this was really important as well.

So what are we doing to date? The Economic and Co-operative Development continues to lead government regulatory reform initiative. This initiative is mandated to review and reduce government regulations and red tape from the 1996 levels by 25 per cent by 2006. Ongoing efforts are being made to pursue and address red tape and paper burden issues that affect small- and medium-sized businesses.

Fourth . . . and there's many more; I could talk about each one at length, but the fourth one is a communications infrastructure. They want better . . . (inaudible) . . . communications. Government actions to date — continued implementation of CommunityNet. The 60 or \$70 million first phase of

CommunityNet ensures access to high-speed Internet for health, education, government offices, and library facilities throughout the province. It has also made it possible for SaskTel to expand commercial high-speed services from eight communities to 46 communities and more.

Immigration policy . . . and this is an important one. I know we've talked a lot about this in this House, Mr. Speaker. They wanted us to take a look at the immigration policy that we have. They want us to develop more resources to the immigration file. Among the areas that they thought we should be concentrating on — ensuring that the provincial nominee program is fully utilized with a more aggressive marketing approach. Make the provincial nominee program a permanent agreement and negotiate with the federal government to increase the number of nominees.

Well what's our action to date, Mr. Speaker? The government has made this commitment to immigration through the establishment of the immigration branch in Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. And this government as well has extended this agreement with the federal government on the provincial nomination program to September 2002, and this agreement will provide for an additional 150 nominees for a total of 300. This province intends to negotiate a multi-year agreement following September 2002.

And number six — and this is one I was referring to — is the education publicity program on rural Saskatchewan successes and competitive position. And this is really, really critical because we have such an opportunity, but what we need to do is be positive, think positive, talk positive, and be positive.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Forbes: — So what are we talking about? What have we done to date? Well the Economic and Co-operative Development has initiated a program called the Saskatchewan Dream campaign that attempts to focus on initiatives and activities that profile Saskatchewan positively. And the government, primarily through the Economic and Co-operative Development and the Rural Revitalization Office, actively participates in recruiting and organizing the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation's annual fall conference held in Muenster and this conference highlights numerous successful rural-based businesses and attracted last time approximately 300 participants. But I understand it was just a major success.

Another program that's really well done, Only in Saskatchewan contest, sponsored by the Economic and Co-operative Development. Youth are preparing Web sites, essays, and artwork telling about their success stories or dreams of achieving success in Saskatchewan. Many of the entries received so far have been rural-based and have been outstanding.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food sponsors AgriBiz, a television agricultural program which highlights advances and innovation.

And as well, and I started off my speech by talking, using a quote from the Saskatchewan Rural Economic Opportunities Conference held this spring, March 2002, March 20 and 21,

which helped participants learn at first hand the skills and experience of Saskatchewan's successful entrepreneurs.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're doing an awful lot. And I could go on, but at this point I would like to second the amendment and go on record as being opposed to the main motion. But I would like to second the amendment as put forward by my colleague. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to stand at last to speak to the motion that was put before us today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment right off the start that the motion spoke more specifically to the realities of rural revitalization and the issues that are facing the rural areas of this province. Unfortunately the amendment which was brought forward completely gutted the original motion and doesn't do a thing in terms of rural revitalization.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, the amendment itself would be deemed unfriendly in almost any other environment because what it does is lauds the government for a program of action which it clearly hasn't achieved. It certainly hasn't set out any clear . . . and it hasn't delineated any clear or precise plan for rural revitalization, and so it shouldn't be lauding itself for its great achievements. They have not been realized as yet.

Mr. Speaker, we have an interesting situation here. We have the words rural revitalization, which produce a very nice little alliteration, an example of alliteration. But we come awfully close to an oxymoron when we talk about rural revitalization tied to the NDP.

(20:30)

Mr. Speaker, we have a very clear failure, a record of abject failure by this government, this NDP government, for the last 10 years when it comes to the rural economy. To talk about rural revitalization in conjunction with those three letters, NDP, sounds to me like a johnny-come-lately situation. They didn't understand what rural revitalization was all about. They didn't understand a need for it. They never once thought about taking any action to achieve rural revitalization until the 1999 election when the Saskatchewan Party made it very clear to this government that if they didn't take rural Saskatchewan seriously, they would lose more than their seats.

Mr. Speaker, rural revitalization is a phoenix that's come out of the ashes of the despair of this party. Rural revitalization is something that is new to this group, and they don't know how to achieve it. They speak laudably about rural revitalization. They say all the right words, but their actions belie their good intentions.

Mr. Speaker, when rural revitalization was first dreamt up, when it was first conceived, when it was first brought to the light of day, we on this side looked at that as a very positive movement by this government. We thought it might have

potential. And, Mr. Speaker, we are now sadly, sadly disillusioned by this government's efforts in that area.

Rural revitalization was talked about in the Throne Speech of a little more than a year ago. But when it came to being a presentation of this government, what did we get? We didn't get a full-blown ministry. We didn't even get a full-blown minister. What we got was a mini-ministry with a part-time minister, one deputy minister, and a handful of bureaucrats.

And what were they charged with? What was the responsibility given to the department of Rural Revitalization, the so-called department of Rural Revitalization? Were they put in charge of new policy initiatives to help vitalize the rural economy? Were they given new opportunities, new objectives, new goals, new funding to achieve anything of significance in rural Saskatchewan? Were they asked to help stop the brain drain, the movement of people from rural areas to cities and to other provinces and maybe even other countries? Were they given any opportunity to put anything in place that would have significant and real effect? Well, Mr. Speaker, the answer is clearly no. It was a mini-ministry: a part-time minister, one deputy minister, a handful of bureaucrats.

Now what was it that they were allowed to do? Well they were allowed to review the things done by the other departments to see that they didn't penalize rural Saskatchewan in any way. They were given an opportunity to assist other departments in meeting certain objectives. They were given oversight opportunities to make sure that direct harm did not come to rural Saskatchewan because of some policy initiative by some other superior ministry. But in terms of having real power, there was none.

They had to depend on moral suasion or their good will or a little bit of influence to achieve the kinds of things, the kinds of goals and objectives that were necessary to keep rural Saskatchewan alive. Not vibrant, Mr. Speaker, just simply alive. It was an attempt, virtually, to resuscitate a corpse.

And I think again, that this government has failed miserably, not only in its inability to put effective programs in place, but when they did establish a mini-ministry it wasn't given any authority or any power. So what we got was the mini-ministry of Rural Revitalization under the direction of the Minister of Highways in that particular government.

Now the Minister of Highways changed and the government reorganized and then we found the deputy minister, the minister in charge of Agriculture and Food suddenly the new Minister of Rural Revitalization. But not only is Rural Revitalization a mini-ministry from the past, now it's been reduced even further because it is now the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. It's all been run together.

In fact I was looking at the new legislation that the minister handed out today. They're going to change the name of the department officially, to the ministry of food, agriculture and rural revitalization. So Rural Revitalization will not be on its own in any respect, and in fact it's now just an adjunct, now it's just a . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. Order, please. Just ask for a

little less noise level so we can hear the member and hear the member's statements.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to continue with my comments under your watchful eye and we will . . . we'll try and make these comments succinctly and poignantly. But maybe I should, maybe I should reiterate some of the earlier points just so that if it was lost in the hubbub in the House, people have an opportunity to catch the salient issues that we've already raised.

Mr. Speaker, where we were was we now have the Department of Rural Revitalization melded into the Department of Agriculture and Food. It is indistinguishable as a separate entity. It is part of a larger entity. And I guess the trouble with that, Mr. Speaker, is that in the cases where a very small entity is relative and proportionate and next to a much larger entity, guess what gets forgotten?

You know the analogy of Canada being a mouse sleeping next to the American elephant was used very poignantly to describe the relationship of Canada to the United States. I would dare say, Mr. Speaker, that the Department of Rural Revitalization has almost reached that limited status. The Department of Rural Revitalization has now been reduced to the mouse next to the elephant of Ag and Food.

So what hope, what hope does the initiatives of rural revitalization have in being realized when the minister's going to be preoccupied with all the trouble that is going to come his way as a result of being in charge of Agriculture and Food? We know as a fact, Mr. Speaker, that Agriculture has many, many serious issues facing it — many troubling issues facing that particular department. And the minister's going to be hugely preoccupied by those particular initiatives and those interests. I doubt if he will concentrate nearly as dedicatedly to the issues of rural revitalization that those issues ought to have. His attention will be clearly dedicated to the other issues that will take precedence in his schedule.

I guess the problem I'm trying to describe here, Mr. Speaker, is that rural revitalization is really much more than an agriculture issue. And I think, frankly, that the government has made a mistake by lumping the two together. Rural revitalization is not about agriculture alone. Rural revitalization is about a wide number of things related to rural activities, and to lump it with agriculture is just a complete oversight on the whole realm of activities that rural revitalization encompasses.

Now I . . . Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I would refer to the committee . . .

The Speaker: — Order, please. I know that there are a lot of people would like to help the member. But I just doubt if the member really needs the help at this stage. So if you'd just allow the member to make his statements, please, in a way that the member can be heard in this Assembly.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To make the point I was trying to delineate earlier, I'm going to refer to the ACRE report that we're all familiar with. We all received the final report of the Action Committee on the Rural Economy submitted to this legislature a month ago. And in the report, I'd

like to refer the members opposite to page 2 of the introduction. In this report they clearly, after many months and hundreds and thousands of hours of study, they very clearly indicated that rural revitalization is much more than just agriculture.

Those of us who come from an agricultural area of the province appreciate the agricultural component, but it doesn't stop there. It's complementary, but it's minimal in terms of what the whole issue of rural revitalization encompasses.

Agriculture is certainly one part of it, but if members opposite would care to refer it, there are other very important elements to rural revitalization. It includes not just primary agriculture but agri-value enterprises. It includes resource development. It includes rural manufacturing and construction. And it also includes, Mr. Speaker, rural service.

To pigeonhole rural revitalization in one department, Ag and Food has done the whole a disservice. And that's the point I think we need to make here tonight. There's been much talk about agriculture and the needs of agriculture; we don't minimize that. But if you're going to talk about rural revitalization and tie it solely to agriculture, you're not going to achieve the results that are necessary to make rural Saskatchewan a vibrant, active part of our economy.

And I think that we need to urge the government to make certain that they take rural revitalization as seriously as their own committee, the ACRE committee, obviously took it in the formation of this particular study.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of rural revitalization has the government talking a good talk, but they don't walk that talk. And I'd like to go through a number of points where I think I can make that case fairly clearly tonight, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to go to the issue of transportation because it's one of the issues that I tend to be a little more familiar with than many others. Transportation in this province has been under tremendous stress. Three years ago the condition of our highways was the number one public concern in this province.

After 10 years of neglect, after 10 years of budget cutting, after 10 years of deliberately setting monies outside of the Department of Highway's budget and spending it elsewhere, our highways started to suffer tremendous cost. The toll on our highways was significant; the damage was real. And anybody who drove our highways could tell you just how bad the highways had deteriorated.

There were exceptional numbers of claims being made against the Department of Highways and through SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) for damage to vehicles. We had truckers who were refusing to drive in the province. We had people who were boycotting certain highways. We had community activists out there fixing their own roads. We had any number of complaints about the condition of our highways.

Now, while I'm not about to dismiss or ignore the reality of that problem and the subsequent attempt by the government to spend all kinds of money to fix those problems, again they were johnny-come-latelies to the issue; because those problems

developed as a result of the previous seven or eight years of neglect by this government.

The infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker, is quite likely the most important foundational element that a government needs to provide in order for its economy to grow. The highways, the highways, Mr. Speaker, are the lifelines of this province. They are absolutely essential to the growth of an effective, prosperous economy.

When your highways deteriorate and start falling apart, the impact is felt through every segment of your economy. In one way or the other every element of the economy is tied fundamentally to the infrastructure.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I do recall that when the issue of highway deterioration became such a hot political topic and the government rushed out to fill every pothole they could by suddenly increasing the budget, the minister responsible for Highways stood in this House day after day after day, and indicated that there was nothing they could do. They were helpless in the face of changing times and they were the victims of circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, day after day railway abandonment, elevator consolidation, and the movement of grain traffic to the roads were given as the primary cause for the deteriorating infrastructure. And the representation of that situation by the ministers of the day — and I use the term plural because we've had several — the representation of the problem suggested that there was nothing the government could have done.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to say there is nothing further from the truth. It was a deliberate, conscientious decision to minimize the expenditures in the Highways department that didn't allow for the repairs as necessary. But it was also this government that decided to increase the size of trucks to allow heavier weights on the roads, to allow for the over-length trucks on the road — those were decisions made by this government, Mr. Speaker. They weren't made by the previous government. They were made by this government. They have to take responsibility for that decision. Overweight trucks, over-length trucks, more trucks — that was a decision that was agreed to by this government.

(20:45)

So to blame the deteriorating road conditions on the excess weight and the excess number of trucks on the road is a direct result of decisions taken by this government. To blame the increased truck traffic on the closure of rail lines, the abandonment of rail lines, is not exactly the way things unfolded, Mr. Speaker. The blame can be laid partially at the feet of this government.

Those rail lines were not abandoned just out of the blue. Railways have to go through a very clear process before they can abandon those tracks. It's a well-defined process. We're all familiar with it. The abandonment of rail lines in rural Saskatchewan did not happen by accident and did not happen without anybody noticing it. The process was in place. The government, through the specialists in the department, monitored the applications for abandonment.

But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, this provincial government, this provincial government, the NDP of the last 10 years, did virtually nothing, nothing to prevent those abandonment applications from going forward. They virtually made no effort to prevent those applications from being successful. So to blame the abandonment of railways and the increased truck traffic on everybody but themselves is not quite being as forthcoming as the government ought to be.

Now let me talk about something else. It was the consolidation of elevators that precipitated all this, according to the government. The consolidation of elevators is a process that has been happening for probably the last 25 or 30 years — maybe even longer. But business conditions and business examples or reasons made that consolidation much more appealing.

I know for a fact that this particular government were on very close speaking terms with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. If this government was not aware of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool's plans to consolidate their elevators, I'd be very surprised. In fact Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was the source of most of this government's agriculture policy; and in order for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool to consolidate its elevators without this government's explicit and express permission, it's inconceivable that that could have happened.

Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, as well as the many other grain companies in this province, undertook a consolidation process with the best intentions, from a business point of view in mind. I don't think I agree with what they did, but they did that on the basis of their bottom line. For this government to stand in this House and say it's all the elevator's fault for consolidation was disingenuous because this government had to know from the start that that was the intention of the elevator companies.

So we've got, we've got absolute infrastructure decay as a result of at least two or three factors that this government had some input to or would have been able to bring some moral suasion to in order to prevent it from happening. And to just lay the blame on somebody else is very indicative of the way the government have handled these kinds of contentious issues, but it is not appropriate and is not in keeping with the facts.

Mr. Speaker, we've talked about the highway infrastructure and touched on the rail infrastructure, but we also have other infrastructure needs that are evident in rural Saskatchewan if rural revitalization is to take hold. You can't have the total decay of water and sewer systems in communities in rural Saskatchewan or in their water treatment facilities or in their . . . in their water plants without having an impact on the economic activity of those communities.

If you, if you lose good quality water, if you lose the ability to treat sewage, if you lose those types of infrastructure systems, communities cannot prosper. The people in those communities are going to suffer. If they think that there's no possible way they're going to have reliable water supplies or reliable sewage treatment systems, they may not want to live there, and that in itself is a source of concern and may often in fact drive people out of the communities.

So we would have a very clear impact on the communities so affected and rural revitalization will be affected very negatively.

It just can't happen. You can't have rural revitalization in communities where water and sewer and those types of infrastructure support systems are not available.

I want to talk about electricity and gas service and the rates charged for customers in rural Saskatchewan. You know, the government has made much ado about the role of Crown corporations and how they would go out and serve rural communities where population numbers were small when no other private sector company would do that. As I understand it, the reason for the Crown corporations' existence initially was to provide the best service for the most people at the least cost.

Mr. Speaker, I can stand here tonight and say that I believe the Crown corporations achieved that. That was their mandate and I think they achieved it. But somewhere in the intervening years, the mandate has changed from that very basic, very clear, best service for the most people for the least price. It's changed to a new mandate. Mr. Speaker, the new mandate is the generation of revenue. The Crown corporations are best described as revenue generators for the provincial government now.

The sad result, Mr. Speaker, is that if the mandate of Crown corporations is to raise money for the provincial government, then the impact is going to be felt on their customers. And the ones that are at most risk of that deliberate policy change are the people in rural Saskatchewan because today they have no alternative — they are captives to the Crown corporation monopoly — and the Crown corporations in all those situations can virtually charge whatever they need to for the services they provide.

Now I'll give you some examples, Mr. Speaker. I would assume that rural revitalization might include the need for some small-business operators to expand their phone service or it might include the desire of some farming or ranching operations to start a feedlot and need a new power service. It might include gas service to some unexpected site that's a mile or two off of the main line.

Mr. Speaker, I've had so many complaints to my office over the last three years where individuals wanted service, a utility service of one type or the other, and when they got the quote as to what it would cost, they could not believe it. The customers were absolutely aghast with the cost estimate. Now the problem with that, Mr. Speaker . . . the problem is that those customers . . . the problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that those customers have no opportunity to go anywhere else to find out if that's a legitimate price. They have no way of comparing the estimate they've been given by the Crown utilities. They have no way of verifying whether that's a realistic figure or not. There is no option.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in terms of rural revitalization I can't imagine anything that would stymie new initiative in rural Saskatchewan quicker than being forced to take your utility services, your most basic infrastructure services, from a company at twice the rate you expect to pay, and have no way of shopping around or comparing it to any other price estimate.

Any other sector of this society, if they got a quotation on the installation of some service and they didn't like it, they'd be able to go to a competitor down the street. They'd be able to

check out two or three or four or maybe ten competitors to find out if their price was realistic. That is not an option in rural Saskatchewan. And when those high estimates dissuade the individuals from proceeding with the projects that they were going to undertake, rural revitalization is the casualty and the loss belongs to rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, that is not acceptable. And if this government wants to do something about rural revitalization, it needs to address those issues with the Crown corporations.

I want to just touch on CommunityNet for a moment, Mr. Speaker. CommunityNet was introduced to this province with great fanfare by the provincial government. And I don't want to stand here and say that it's a bad idea. It's connected a lot of communities to a service that is going to be important to them. If it's not already important it will become increasingly important as time progresses.

But, Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet, as I understand it now, is going into selected communities throughout the province, and I'm sure there's some rationale for what communities are picked but as yet, Mr. Speaker, I have not been able to determine what that rationale really is. I know that CommunityNet is going into schools, it's going into health centres, hospitals, and going into government offices as a first priority. But, Mr. Speaker, CommunityNet is going into communities in some instances ahead of other communities that actually have those facilities but aren't on the list to get CommunityNet. If there's a rational explanation for how those communities have been selected, I'd like to hear it. I have yet to hear it from the government.

But what's even more important I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that while CommunityNet might have an important educational role, while it might have an important element to play, a role to play in transferring information between health centres and the health bosses here in Regina, while it might have an important role to play in communication generally, the CommunityNet system this government is so proud of does not have today an impact on businesses in rural Saskatchewan.

How many businesses do you know, Mr. Speaker, in rural Saskatchewan where the individual proprietor needs computer service and is willing to go to his nearest hospital or his nearest school library to place his order, or to look up the information that is important to his business?

As good as CommunityNet might be, it is not the tool that was needed for rural Saskatchewan business endeavours today. And if I understood the report produced by the ACRE committee correctly, we need initiatives in the area of business development not in 6 years, not in 10 years, not in 20 years; we need those initiatives today. Time is short. We do not have time to squander in terms of rural revitalization.

And if the government could see its way clear to making those services available to rural Saskatchewan so business operators could make most use of them, then I would be all in favour of having that happen.

Mr. Speaker, in order for rural revitalization to happen, we need to see investment opportunities realized in rural Saskatchewan.

Earlier this evening I talked about the five main areas that are necessary for development if real rural revitalization is to occur: agriculture, value-added agriculture, resources, rural manufacturing and construction, and rural service.

We need investment opportunities in all those sectors. We need an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to see investment flow to this province. We need to remove the barriers to investment in this province.

And I heard as part of our earlier discussions today, several references to the ethanol industry. And I'd like to just go back to that particular point again, Mr. Speaker, because the ethanol industry I believe is a very good and specific example of the kind of investment initiative, the kind of developmental opportunity that we desperately need in rural Saskatchewan. And we need to see it come to fruition. We need to see it develop and mature and become a contributing part of our economy. There is a very significant role for ethanol to play in the overall economic well-being of this province.

(21:00)

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, when I talk to proponents of ethanol, when I listened to the ACRE committee's presentation in this legislature, when I heard the government talk about their ideas for ethanol back before Christmas in informal situations, and more recently in the legislature here, I was quite encouraged. But, Mr. Speaker, what I have seen happen in the last few weeks on the ethanol file, in relationship to this government's plan has discouraged me personally and many people who are very, very close to the ethanol industry in this province right now.

I have seen many people who have dedicated hours of volunteer effort to making an ethanol facility a part of their community, seriously discouraged by the government's seemingly inept way of addressing this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, in the budget this year it was talked about removing the tax on ethanol fuel to bring down the cost of ethanol to relatively similar level with ordinary gasoline. The tax would allow for the ethanol industry to compete on a level playing field.

That was, I believe, about April 1, very last part of March. Now here we are just in the middle of May, which is six weeks later. And for the last week, at least, we have had the government saying that they are looking very seriously at a partnership with an American firm to develop ethanol plants in four or five communities around the province. And Crown Investments Corporation will invest money because that's going to be necessary to keep the private partner happy.

You know that is such a bizarre argument, Mr. Speaker, I can't believe any rational thinking person would even buy into that. There is no logical reason for that argument to be made let alone bought by anybody in this province.

Mr. Speaker, in six weeks it would be impossible for any local community to secure private funding given the uncertainties of that file prior to the April 1 announcement. But for the government to go from one view of the ethanol industry to

another in six weeks is just unacceptable. They have not given the industry time to develop of its own accord and its own initiative. The government has decided that in six weeks if you haven't got your financing in place we're going to bring you a plan with our own partners and this is the way it's going to be.

Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing will discourage additional outside investment in the ethanol industry in this province, in contradiction to the statements made by the previous minister. Nothing will discourage that investment faster than for the government, through CIC, to get in bed with a single company and dictate the terms of ethanol development in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the ethanol industry, if we follow the government's blueprint for development, is at serious risk. I can't emphasize that enough, Mr. Speaker. The ethanol industry in this province is at serious risk of ever materializing, ever developing, ever being a contributing part of our economy if the government moves forward with its proposed plan.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's too important as an industry, its potential is too important to this particular province to allow that to happen. We need to see a very clear leadership role taken by the government, but it does not necessarily mean the involvement of the taxpayers' money in that industry through CIC.

The question I'd like to ask tonight, Mr. Speaker is, has the government learned anything — has the government learned anything following its experience in the potato industry? Or are they prepared to relive that debacle one more time?

Mr. Speaker, I'm only on the third point of a 10-point speech. But I do want to refer once more to the report by the ACRE Committee. You know, I think that it'll be very hard for the government and the members here tonight to say anything contrary to the report that they commissioned. They're going to find it especially hard because the Minister of Agriculture stood in this House and said that his government was going to implement every point in this report — every one of them, all of them.

Mr. Speaker, if that happens, that will represent the greatest conversion since St. Paul met his Maker on the road to Damascus.

Mr. Speaker, this report is a repudiation of the NDP's economic platform and policies. This report is in direct contradiction to what the NDP stands for. This report should make the NDP blush with embarrassment.

Mr. Speaker, let me just read a little bit of this report, if I may. Mr. Speaker, this report, on page 3 of the introduction, summarizes much of their work. And if I may, I'd like to read these points:

There needs to be (a) massive investment in the rural economy.

The size of the investment dictates that the vast majority of the investment must come from the private sector generally and out-of-province sources specifically . . .

It is up to the private sector to take advantage of the

opportunities. Jobs cannot be created for the sake of jobs, but must arise as a desirable spin-off of profitable businesses.

The population of rural Saskatchewan will need to grow from 575,000 to 800,000 over the next twenty years in order to provide an adequate labour force.

There must be a significant increase in international and inter-provincial migration to the province to meet this employment and population target.

In summing up what ACRE has learned over the course of its work, the members of ACRE came to the conclusion that:

... the fundamental change that must be made to revive the fortunes of rural Saskatchewan must come from within rural Saskatchewan. While the provincial government has an important role to play in facilitating change, (not buying it, not investing in it, but facilitating change) and outside investment in both terms of capital and people, at the end of the day it is the residents of rural Saskatchewan that will make the key difference in "turning around rural Saskatchewan".

There's six more points here, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to refer to quickly.

There are a large number of opportunities in rural Saskatchewan. (And this is point number 1, Mr. Speaker.) The report highlights many examples of entrepreneurs and local communities taking advantage of opportunities and creating wealth and employment.

Point number 2, Mr. Speaker:

The "status quo" or "business as usual" is not an option. We cannot keep doing what we have been doing if we are truly serious about reversing the decline. Making only minor changes or tinkering at the edges will not work; we have tried this type of strategy for years and it has not worked.

Number 3, Mr. Speaker:

The negative attitude of some Saskatchewan residents, both urban and rural about rural Saskatchewan is a major obstacle to reviving the fortunes of rural Saskatchewan. Many rural residents see no future in rural Saskatchewan and this affects their outlook in terms of developing new initiatives or new businesses that could impact positively on their lives and communities.

The negativity about rural Saskatchewan does not make rural Saskatchewan an attractive place for new immigrants or for new investment.

If we wish to stop the decline of population and keep the young people in rural Saskatchewan we need to create jobs in rural Saskatchewan. (That was point number 4, Mr. Speaker.)

(Number 5) The creation of jobs will come about from

entrepreneurs and local communities with ideas. Through hard work and investment these ideas will translate into profitable businesses which will then create employment for rural residents.

And number 6, Mr. Speaker, I highlighted this very clearly:

The role of government is not to pick winners but to set the proper economic and business climate and remove roadblocks so that Saskatchewan entrepreneurs and communities can take advantage of the opportunities.

I pray that happens, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the original motion and not the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Jones: — I've listened very intently to the speakers on both sides, and I want to pick up on some of the same points that were just made by the previous speaker because indeed you can put whatever spin you like on whatever quote you choose. And I'm not going to quote at length as the members opposite have chosen to do in their remarks, Mr. Speaker, but I want to pick up in particular on point number three that was just referred to by the member opposite under the heading of what ACRE found.

And what ACRE found was that the negative attitude of some Saskatchewan residents, both rural and urban, about rural Saskatchewan is a major obstacle to reviving the fortunes of rural Saskatchewan.

Many rural residents see no future in rural Saskatchewan and this affects their outlook in terms of developing new initiatives or new businesses that could impact positively on their lives and on their communities.

The negativity about rural Saskatchewan does not make rural Saskatchewan an attractive place for new immigrants or new investment.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that the members opposite by and large are the leaders in their community. And they are the ones, Mr. Speaker, who are fostering and propagating and enhancing and otherwise really impacting and unloading their negative attitude on rural Saskatchewan, and it is no wonder that there has been any sense of despair.

And believe me, it's not for lack of trying on behalf of this government. We have many initiatives, we have done many things in the past, we have many to do in the future. We believe in rural Saskatchewan, unlike the negative nabobs across the way. And, Mr. Speaker, there is so much to be said about this topic. Much has been said and I would appreciate the opportunity to say much more. But considering the time of the evening, I think that this would indeed be an appropriate opportunity to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Debate adjourned.

The Assembly adjourned at 21:13.