



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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 Premier — Hon. Brad Wall
 Leader of the Opposition — Dwain Lingenfelter

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Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly, it's my privilege to introduce in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, a good friend of mine, Larry Burechailo from Rosetown. Larry has been a good friend for many years and a great supporter in my political career, and I'd like to ask the Assembly to please give him a warm welcome.

The Speaker: — I'd like to recognize the minister responsible for municipal government.

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce three gentlemen to the Chamber who are no strangers to the Chamber: Mr. Michael Fougere, a city councillor here in the city of Regina; and Mr. David Marit, the president of SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. Great to have them here today. And while I'm on my feet, I would like to encourage everybody across the province to go out and vote today as it's municipal election day.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister was absolutely correct; neither of these gentlemen are strangers to the House. Very pleased to see both of them. A little surprised they have got enough time to be languishing around in the gallery on election day, but . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Oh, you're acclaimed. Oh well, I guess that's the way it's done, Mr. Speaker. You need to be acclaimed.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I just want to pass along and join my colleague in welcoming them to the House, and look forward to seeing them at many, many occasions throughout the next few years and thanking them for their contributions to the province.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today, Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition in support of long-term facility in La Ronge. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately invest in the planning and construction of a long-term care beds in La Ronge.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

It is signed by the good people of La Ronge and area. I so

present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to present a petition in support of fairness for students here in the province of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately expand the graduate retention program to include master's and Ph.D. graduates.

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

Mr. Speaker, the individuals that signed this petition are mostly from the good city of Saskatoon. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present yet another petition on behalf of the rural residents of Saskatchewan who question why the Sask Party government is leaving them behind with respect to providing safe and affordable water and who have yet not heard any commitment of assistance. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to financially assist the town of Duck Lake residents for the good of their health and safety, due to the exorbitant water rates that are being forced on them by a government agency, and that this government fulfills its commitment to rural Saskatchewan.

I present these petitions on behalf of the good residents of Duck Lake.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I stand and present a petition regarding support for maintaining quality health care services. The petition's about the Government of Saskatchewan realizing the value of a full range of professional skills offered by the health care providers, and it's promoted that they address the retention and recruitment issues by ensuring safe staffing levels. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to commit to maintaining quality health care services and job security for all public health care providers.

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

The petitions are signed by residents from Swift Current, Humboldt, Dundurn, and Davidson. I so present.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from The Battlefords.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and present a petition in support of affordable housing in The Battlefords. Mr. Speaker, the residents note that the vacancy rate for rental accommodation in The Battlefords is very low and the cost of rental accommodation is increasing at an alarming rate. The prayer, Mr. Speaker:

The petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly may be pleased to call upon the government of Saskatchewan to develop an affordable housing program that will result in a greater number of quality and affordable rental units to be made available to a greater number of people throughout The Battlefords, and that will implement a process of rent review or rent control to better protect tenants in a non-competitive housing environment.

Mr. Speaker, the petition is signed by residents of North Battleford and Yorkton, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions of behalf of concerned residents as it relates to the unprecedented mismanagement of their finances. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your honourable Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the Sask Party government to start managing our provincial finances responsibly and prudently to ensure that it does not continue its trend of massive budgetary shortfalls, runaway and unsustainable spending, equity stripping from our Crowns, and irresponsible revenue setting.

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

These petitions are signed by concerned citizens from Shaunavon, Kindersley, and Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. I so present.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Women's Cancer Awareness Month

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October is Women's Cancer Awareness Month. The Canadian Cancer Society encourages women to take an active role in maintaining their health to reduce their risk of cancer. Women can help reduce their chances of getting cancer by making healthy choices every day. At least half of all cancers can be prevented by healthy living and policies that protect the health of all Canadians.

There are four common cancers in women that can be detected early by screening tests or by having signs and symptoms

checked by your doctor: breast, cervical, colorectal, and skin.

Screening tests can help find cancer at its earliest, most treatable stage. When cancer is found early, it is often easier to treat. Recognizing symptoms and getting regular checkups also help detect cancer early.

Mr. Speaker, we focus a lot of our attention on breast cancer this month, and rightly so. However, women need to be aware and alert for the three other common and equally as serious cancers that can affect them. Our common goal is to beat all cancers so no one else dies.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Wearing Pink for Breast Cancer

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise in the House today wearing the symbolic pink ribbon for breast cancer awareness. Many people across Saskatchewan have been impacted by breast cancer, one of the most common cancer among women.

I can truly empathize with all those families dealing with the loss of a loved one because I too have lost my mother and my best friend to breast cancer. We have lost too many mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, and neighbours to this illness. It may have the power to take away a woman's health but it will never be strong enough to take away her heart, her spirit, and her love. We are making progress — early detection, effective treatment, innovative research, and endless hope is saving lives. We can still do more.

So today like every day, I want to remember my mother and I also want to remember all the brave women and also the men who have been touched by breast cancer. We wear pink to honour them and to honour their courage. We wear pink to stand united against this terrible illness. We wear pink because we are ready to hope together, to pray together, to endure together, and to survive together. We wear pink for all the women in our lives we can't imagine living without. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from The Battlefords.

Affordable Housing Needed in The Battlefords

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most pressing issues in The Battlefords continues to be the lack of affordable housing. And I again, through the Legislative Assembly, ask that the Saskatchewan Party government devote more time, energy, and investment towards this pressing need.

As members will see through this session, I will be presenting petitions signed mostly by residents of Killdeer Apartments in North Battleford, who this summer were provided notice of a 40 per cent rent increase to take effect on February the first. Mr. Speaker, these people, seniors on fixed income and young people in low- to moderate-income jobs, can't afford the increase in rent because there is no virtually no affordable rental accommodation in the community. They have no place to go and no place to turn.

The provincial government has told us frequently that there will be provincial assistance to increase the number of affordable rental units in The Battlefords, but nothing is happening and as a result, seniors are thinking about or actually taking steps to move out of the community. Students are planning to attend North West Regional College and are choosing not to enrol. Immigrants recently attracted to the community are bunking up in multiples too large to benefit them or our community. And young people seeking their first job are choosing to settle elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, the people of The Battlefords deserve better. They deserve better treatment from their landlord. They deserve better treatment and more access to additional affordable accommodation and they deserve a better response from the provincial government. On their behalf I ask the Minister Responsible for Housing to act and act quickly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Municipal Election Day

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the words of Aristotle, “If liberty and [equity] . . . are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.”

It’s municipal election day here in Saskatchewan and it is fitting, Mr. Speaker, that we should turn to Aristotle for insight. Modern democracy was born during the time that Aristotle penned those words.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the candidates who took the brave steps of putting their names forward. Their commitment to improving the lives of others is setting a shining example for all of us. It may be their first steps on a path that leads them to a seat here in this House.

Mr. Speaker, to stress the importance of exercising the right to vote, I turn to the French philosopher, Voltaire:

So long as the people do not care to exercise their freedom, those who wish to tyrannize will do so; for tyrants are active and ardent, and will devote themselves in the name of any number of gods, religious and otherwise, to put shackles upon sleeping men.

Those words were true in the 16th century, Mr. Speaker, and those words remain true today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Canadian Fire Chief of the Year

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prince Albert fire chief, Les Karpluk, was recently named Fire Chief of the Year by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs. Mr. Speaker, this award is given out each year to two fire chiefs — one for volunteer and one for career fire chiefs. The president of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs said, “The Chiefs we

honour this year have both displayed exemplary leadership to their staff and outstanding commitment to protecting the safety of their communities.”

Chief Karpluk is a 27-year career veteran of fire emergency services. He became Prince Albert’s fire chief in 2006 and has a staff of 50 people working under his command.

Chief Karpluk was instrumental in founding the Prince Albert fire mentoring program. This unique program was set up to help youth at risk in our community. Under this program, youth — many of whom struggle with social problems and addictions — are partnered with firefighters and are exposed to an environment of teamwork, determination, trust, safety, and family. Chief Karpluk has worked tirelessly to ensure that this program works and that it’s reaching at-risk youth.

Chief Karpluk is an exemplary leader both at work and in our community, Mr. Speaker. I ask that all members join with me in extending our congratulations to Prince Albert fire chief, Les Karpluk, this year’s Canadian Fire Chief of the Year.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Meadow Lake.

Meadow Lake Wins Western Canada Volleyball Tournament

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Mr. Speaker, it’s been good news all around for the soon-to-be new city of Meadow Lake. Monday it was announced that help was on the way for Meadow Lake doctors with two new doctors to be soon arriving in the community and two more expressing interest in coming to our fine city.

And over the weekend my former team, the Meadow Lake Carpenter High Spartans, won it all at the Western Canadian high school volleyball tournament, defeating the Winnipeg Glenlawn Lions two sets to one for the victory. Meadow Lake players Cam Leskowski and Gary Kuffert were named to the tournament all-star team, with Dean Villeneuve winning the award for best defensive player.

Spartans coach and my former math teacher, Gerry Varjassy, said of the win:

It’s great. This is history. We look at this as one of the classiest tournaments in Saskatchewan. We appreciate the invite to it each year. We tell our athletes that we want to put on a show.

And put on a show they did, Mr. Speaker, and did Meadow Lake very proud in the process.

[13:45]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Apprenticeship Awards

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, last Friday I, along with the member from Saskatoon Greystone, attended the ninth annual Apprenticeship Awards in Regina.

The Apprenticeship Awards were hosted by the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and the various commission boards to recognize all the apprentices who graduated at the top of their class. Awards are presented under the major headings of outstanding new journey person, apprenticeship commission scholarships and awards, the Saskatchewan youth apprenticeship scholarships, as well, Mr. Speaker, as honouring their apprenticeship journey person industry partners.

There were over 78 awards in all handed out during the evening and the names of all honourees appeared in the local newspapers the next day.

In 1944, Mr. Speaker, the first apprenticeship Act designated 13 trades. Today in 2009, we have 47 designated trades, 8,900 apprentices, and 4,000-plus students enrolled in the Saskatchewan youth apprenticeship scholarships.

Mr. Speaker, this year Saskatchewan celebrates 65 years of the apprenticeship program and 50 years in the Red Seal program. Mr. Speaker, most of these graduates received the Red Seal, and it further impressed upon me the importance of the Red Seal program and how important it is to maintain the high standard of our programs and graduates and to guard against any watering down of these standards.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank those responsible for the evening: master of ceremonies, Hazel Hack; and the board members; sponsors; commission board Chair, Garry Kot; and the chief executive officer, Joe Black. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

H1N1 Pandemic Planning

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] news reported today that there are six suspected cases of H1N1 in the University of Saskatchewan residences. But students at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] aren't scheduled to be immunized until November 24th, according to the Saskatoon Health Region. This raises the question of a pandemic raging across campus for a full month before the vaccination can be readily available for the faculty and the students. And we already know that younger people are at a greater risk for severe complications from H1N1.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: in light of this new outbreak, what are the government's contingency plans? Will they be scheduling a specific clinic immediately to protect students, particularly those that are living in residences, from this latest outbreak?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, we certainly know that H1 is in our province. It started to escalate in British Columbia a number of weeks ago. It's moving across Alberta. It's certainly in Saskatchewan. And we're seeing our numbers

across the province increase. There is the example out at Wilcox at Notre Dame College with an increase in cases out there. And certainly what they did, Mr. Speaker, was self-isolate. And that's what we're telling all the general public, if they're feeling any ill symptoms, to self-isolate, Mr. Speaker.

But what we really rely on more than anything else is the great work that our chief medical officer, Moira McKinnon, and our assistant medical officer, Dr. Shahab, has been doing on behalf of the province. We take our guidance from those experts as to where the vaccinations will be, which priority groups will be given the vaccination first, and we're well under way in Saskatchewan with our health care providers, Mr. Speaker. I think the rollout of the vaccine has been very well handled, especially when you compare it to other provinces.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to compare it to other provinces. They've been able to adjust their plans in light of the growing demand for the vaccine. Just yesterday the Government of Alberta added 11 new clinics across the province to keep up with the growing demand. More than 51,000 people, including 38,000 members of the public, have already been vaccinated. In Winnipeg more than 15,000 people had been vaccinated as of 3 p.m. yesterday.

To the minister, Mr. Speaker, though you to the minister: outbreaks have started. Other provinces are stepping up their vaccination efforts. How many Saskatchewan people have been vaccinated to date? And will the department or the ministry be adding new clinics to cope with the growing demand for the vaccine?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely stand behind the rollout of the vaccine and the immunization plan within our province. I would hope that that member would know it's not the number of clinics that you have; it's the vaccine that you have available to immunize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the vaccine that we have is rolling out across the province. We are immunizing our health care providers first. I guess I would ask her to stand in her place and say we should change that and start vaccinating the general public and exclude our health care workers, if that's what she's saying.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I just want to remind members that the rules ask members to place their questions through the Speaker and not refer directly to individuals. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I heard the minister say we don't have enough vaccine to start rolling it out. We're obviously going to be behind other provinces. We're not ready for this obviously.

And it's already been established, Mr. Speaker, that the government has created a lot of confusion around H1N1, but now it's accelerating. The provincial government's website says

that children between the ages of six months to five years are a high-risk group and that vaccinations will begin November 2nd. The Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region's website states that children up to four will be immunized. And I spoke to someone today who said they were told by someone in the health region that it was six months to one year.

So to the minister: when will he get a handle on this situation and provide the correct information to parents so they can make good decisions and have some peace of mind around this issue, especially for their children?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, our province is absolutely no further behind, Mr. Speaker. In fact I think we're leading on this file.

The vaccine is rolled out across the country from the federal government, from . . . The Public Health Agency of Canada sends out a certain number of vaccine per capita. We're receiving just as much vaccine per capita as any other province.

It's the rollout within the province that's the most important, Mr. Speaker. We're rolling that vaccine out as to meet the cohort that is available. If we have 2,000 vaccines, Mr. Speaker, we don't want to do what has been done in other provinces . . . is invite 5,000 to be vaccinated because 3,000 then are not vaccinated when you've invited them to the clinic.

Mr. Speaker, each health region rolls out their vaccine plan according to the amount of vaccine they have available, Mr. Speaker. I think it's being handled extremely well . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well the member opposite, the members opposite are saying we don't have enough. That could be no further from, absolutely further from the truth, Mr. Speaker, because, Mr. Speaker, we've received it per capita like any other province. This is exactly what I talked about yesterday, about fearmongering.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Reimbursement for Travel for Medical Services

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on November 8th of 2008 . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I ask the members to come to order. I ask the member from Saskatoon Nutana to come to order. The member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Mr. Speaker, on November 8th, 2008, the Premier responded to a question on the government's criteria for reimbursing out-of-province medical travel in *The StarPhoenix*, and I quote, his response was: "There is right now a review underway in our ministry on our policy on out-of-province travel and what is reimbursable and what is not." We assumed that that would have all been included in the patient-first review, but the report didn't contain any recommendations when it came to out-of-province travel.

So my question is to the minister: whatever became of the review which the Premier referred? Was Mr. Dagnone supposed to address this issue and didn't? And when will we see the government's new criteria?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, yes the member opposite is right. We have asked the ministry to look at out-of-province travel for medical services. We know that if they travel across Canada, those services, we have a reciprocal agreement with other provinces. The patient may have to cover their travel costs, but their medical costs are covered.

When we look at out of country though, Mr. Speaker, that is a different issue, and prior approval is needed before they start travelling out of the country for medical services.

Mr. Speaker, we committed to doing a review on that. That review is still being looked at, Mr. Speaker. It is a very complex issue and, Mr. Speaker, the ministry is looking at how we can better serve the people of our province. One thing that we are doing though, Mr. Speaker, is working on having the proper health care professionals within our province, that we can supply some of those services right here at home.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that the initial comments made by the Premier were almost a year ago, so we would assume that there would be some type of information forthcoming. But a policy in this area really is sorely needed, and this government really has a habit of making decisions about health care based on politics rather than on the best advice available.

They charged ahead with essential service rules that they can't meet on a day-to-day business, never mind in a strike. And they commissioned a review on the needle exchange, and then they've ignored its recommendations. They also announced this review of out-of-province medical travel, but all they've actually done is pay the bills of one family that they used as political props while they were in opposition.

To the minister: when will he stop playing politics and announce the government's new criteria for reimbursing out-of-province medical travel?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in my earlier answer that we are reviewing out-of-county, it's not out-of-province travel. It's out-of-country travel. I think that is the biggest issue, Mr. Speaker.

She said that there is no policy. Well she's incorrect there because the policy that exists today is the policy that existed under 16 years of NDP [New Democratic Party] government, Mr. Speaker. And if she's questioning that policy, it's too bad they wouldn't have questioned it a little bit closer when they were in power, Mr. Speaker, because it does have some issues that need to be addressed, and that's why we're looking at it,

Mr. Speaker. That's why we're reviewing it, and I look forward to the recommendations that will come forward through the Ministry of Health as to what would better serve the people of our province.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll go back and check the documents, but I'm pretty sure that the Premier's comments were on out-of-province travel, so we need to get a bit of clarity here.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party has got an awful lot of political mileage out of this issue while they were in opposition, and they got to be all things to all people. But now they're in government. They're hiding behind this . . . I guess it's a review the Premier says, the minister says sometime coming soon. Now maybe it's because their new criteria for reimbursing people is the same old story — whatever makes the best politics.

So my question to the minister: we know that people who appear in Sask Party campaign commercials got reimbursed, but what about the rest of the province? When will this government announce a new criteria for reimbursing out-of-province medical expenses? And what gets covered, what doesn't, and how much longer will Saskatchewan families have to wait?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting. The member opposite, by the sounds of that question, wants us to change the policy that has been in place under their government for 16 years. Mr. Speaker, obviously she's feeling that that isn't. Now maybe by the sounds coming from the opposition side right now, as they're heckling, then maybe they don't want the policy changed. We don't know where they stand on it.

What I can say is that we weren't very happy with some of the decisions that were made in the past; we wanted to review that policy. That review is taking place, Mr. Speaker. And we look forward to the findings of that review, Mr. Speaker, because there are cases that certainly weren't covered under the old system that we felt should be. And we brought those to this Assembly and brought them to the public's attention, Mr. Speaker.

We want to make sure that those policies . . . [inaudible] . . . through the Ministry of Health regarding for the most part out-of-country because in-country, interprovincial travel, the medical expenses are covered; the travel expenses aren't.

That's the way it was under the former government. That's the way it's under us.

But the out-of-country travel, Mr. Speaker, out-of-country services, we'll certainly be looking at.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Management of Provincial Economy

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party's fondness for balloons, cakes, and ribbons is well documented, and as of course their love for pompoms as well, Mr. Speaker. They love the pompoms.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, we also know of their fondness for axing funding for worthy projects, projects like Station 20 West and projects like the shrinking that they're doing at St. Mary School, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatoon.

On October 13th, the Minister of Advanced Education attended a photo op for the ground breaking ceremony of the E wing of the academic health sciences building. Three days later, Mr. Speaker — 72 hours after the photo op, Mr. Speaker — the government clawed back \$32.1 million from the project, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the minister: why the pulled funding? Why is the Sask Party letting down the people of Saskatoon and the people of Saskatchewan?

[14:00]

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk about the significant investments we're making in post-secondary education, especially at the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we can talk about the progress being made on the D wing and now E wings of the academic health science building. We can simply say, Mr. Speaker, that the construction is proceeding apace, and it came in under budget, saving millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker.

What's that allowed us to do? It's allowed us to save taxpayers' dollars and it's allowed us to ensure that we're going to be training more doctors and nurses, providing better health care for the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to talk about post-secondary education. We have thousands of students receiving excellent education in this province, and, Mr. Speaker, helping to move this province forward. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the health sciences project is vital to the delivery of health care to people here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party members opposite would like us to believe that they're able to manage the books. We've seen in recent weeks and months, Mr. Speaker, that nothing could be further from reality.

This government has proved that it is horrible at managing the province's financial resources. They would like us to believe, Mr. Speaker, that somehow, magically, somehow they'll be able to pay for this project as they go along, Mr. Speaker.

Well the pay-as-you-go approach might be a convenient out for the Premier, Mr. Speaker, but for the government that delivered a \$1.3 billion blunder, Mr. Speaker, it's a little hard to believe, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the minister: why won't he admit that the Sask Party is engaged in a shell game? Why won't he admit, Mr. Speaker, that the Sask Party is taking from Peter to pay Paul?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you for the opportunity again to speak about our investments regarding post-secondary education. We can speak specifically at the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, where for 16 years it was ignored that new student residences were required, Mr. Speaker. We're moving forward on that, Mr. Speaker. It was ignored, Mr. Speaker — announced several times — but no construction started on any of the academic health science building, Mr. Speaker. We know their track record.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as construction continues — and I was just there on the weekend, Mr. Speaker — as it continues apace, the legacy of the NDP is this: they allowed the College of Medicine to sit on probation, Mr. Speaker. We're constructing the academic health science building so that never happens again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, the question is not about the value of the building. The question is about their inability to manage a budget, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, they don't get it. Mr. Speaker, they do not understand that things are not getting easier. They've blown the billions. The boom is over. Revenue is down, and they're sitting there shell-shocked. They're asking themselves, Mr. Speaker, where did all the money go? They don't know, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the minister: when will he admit it? When will he admit he's messed up the budget, their government has messed up the budget, and Saskatchewan people are going to have to pay?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I'm a little bit surprised by the tone of the member opposite. For over 100 years, the University of Saskatchewan has provided top quality education to the people of this province. It was added . . . in 1974 to the University of Regina, as well a proud legacy at the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] campuses — four of them — as well as our regional colleges and a collection of affiliated, federated, and one associate college, Mr. Speaker. We have more than 70,000 learners across our post-secondary skills training system. And, Mr. Speaker, to hear the member opposite talk down the proud heritage and current excellence that is within that system, Mr. Speaker, I find a little bit surprising.

Mr. Speaker, we're making progress on advanced education. That's why we just moved forward \$117 million of infrastructure investments shared through federal and provincial initiatives, Mr. Speaker, \$150 million since we've taken over government. It's a record, Mr. Speaker. It certainly stands in sharp contrast to what the members opposite even contemplated, never mind . . .

The Speaker: — The minister's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, the only thing, the only thing I'm talking down, Mr. Speaker, is their ability to manage the budget because it is brutal, Mr. Speaker. They cannot manage the budget.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the finances of the province are in disarray, as is the communication among the members opposite. The Minister of Health says this is a project. We need it. The Minister of Advanced Ed says, oh yes you're getting the project. But then when it comes to the Minister of Finance, he says, well guess what, guys? The Premier's been doing my bookkeeping and — guess what? — we're broke, guys, sorry. Project, give me that money back please.

My question . . . Well if the big guns can't answer this question, perhaps some of the new ministers who are itching to answer a question can help us out. What's going on over there? Why aren't you managing the budget properly?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise and to answer the member's question. Mr. Speaker, over the course of this early session, the question that has been asked is, where has the money gone. Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I am actually very, very proud of detailing where the money has gone. When we took office . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, at the date of September 30, 2007, the balance in the Growth and Financial Security Fund or its predecessor was \$1.256 billion. The provincial General Revenue Fund debt was \$6.8 billion. Those are facts. Mr. Speaker, over the course, over the course of our government, we have paid off over . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite want to hear the answer, we have paid off over \$2.6 billion of provincial debt. That's where the money has gone, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have a balance of \$840 million at the current time.

And, Mr. Speaker, somewhere in Saskatchewan, there's families battling colorectal cancer. We now provide help for

those families. That's where the money has gone. We have single moms that are trying to make a living and trying to improve their education and their housing needs. That's where the money has gone. Mr. Speaker, there's any number of items that we can point to where the money has gone. The money has gone to benefit the people of Saskatchewan, as opposed to the . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. I just want to remind members, if the Speaker is called to his feet to interrupt debate, the Speaker will not take the debate away, the moments away, either from the question or from the responder. And it's not the right of the members to be questioning the Speaker as to when, decision when he calls time or calls order.

I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Vehicle Insurance Rates

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the record of the Sask Party government on Crowns and affordability is this: they charged the highest price for home heating natural gas during last winter's home heating season. They reduced the price of gas, and then they jacked up the price of electricity for this summer. Now in just four days, the latest Sask Party cash grab is to increase Saskatchewan motorists' auto rates.

To the minister: why are Saskatchewan people always getting the short end of your choices?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for SGI.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that when SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] had an opportunity to look at some of the balancing that was required — because there hadn't been anything done since the year 2001 — they looked at the various categories, and they determined that there was a balancing between one area and another. And we had an opportunity to make sure that the right people were paying for the right amount. And I'm also very pleased to say that 45 per cent of the people in the province actually had a decrease in their rates.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of this province are very pleased with the service they're receiving from this government.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, you know, there's a lot of families in Saskatchewan that are hurting right now, today. Saskatchewan people applying for EI [employment insurance] benefits in August grew by 8.9 per cent. In the past seven days alone, there's been over 1,100 layoffs of Saskatchewan working men and women — 300 at Case New Holland and more than 800 in the potash industry.

To the minister: how are these and other Saskatchewan families supposed to pay for all these Sask Party cash grabs?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Corporations.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I think that the question that the member should be asking over there is the money that was spent in this province is now going to the people of this province. We are no longer deciding to spend money that we get and raise in this province, to put it into projects outside of our province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the people of the province are proud of the fact that \$301 million was spent by the previous government outside the boundaries of our province and basically lost to the people of this province.

We needed money for health care. We needed money for education. We needed money for highways. And where did it go? It went to BC [British Columbia]. It went to Channel Lake. It went wherever they decided. There was no choices for the people in the province. What we have is chosen Saskatchewan people outside of our boundaries.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Coronation Park.

Mr. Trew: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. What this rate increase means for Saskatchewan people . . . an average rate increase of four and a half per cent. More than half of all Saskatchewan drivers will see rate increases, many of them as high as twelve and a half per cent. But there's still time. The Sask Party government can reverse this mean-spirited, latest, cash grab rate increase.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: does your government really believe that Saskatchewan drivers can afford to pay yet another twelve and a half per cent increase right now? How can your government possibly be so out of touch, and will . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. The rules apply equally to all. The member may place his question.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier: does your government really believe Saskatchewan drivers can afford to pay yet another twelve and a half per cent increase right now? How can your government be so out of touch? Will the Premier do the right thing and just call the whole thing off?

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Investments.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, we're well aware that rate increases do occur. In fact in 1999, the now Leader of the Opposition called utility rate hikes a fact of life. A fact of life is what happens, we have no . . . [inaudible] . . . Mr. Speaker, what the members opposite don't want to acknowledge is that our government has made life a lot easier for the people of this province.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — It would certainly be appropriate for the

person asking the question to at least allow the minister to respond without interruption. I recognize the minister responsible.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think what the members opposite don't want to acknowledge is that our government has made life significantly easier for a lot of Saskatchewan people. Lower income taxes will see a single parent, earning \$35,000 a year, with two children, they're going to save \$2,800. That same family could benefit from the largest reduction in education property tax in the province's history. We're proud of our record, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — I'll ask members to come to order so the House can proceed.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister responsible for Energy and Resources.

Wind Power Production

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to inform you and the Assembly about an important development by SaskPower and the future of renewable energy in Saskatchewan. Today I had the pleasure of announcing two new programs which will be introduced by SaskPower which will see the corporation more than double its wind power production.

The green options plan will see SaskPower purchase up to 175 megawatts of wind power from one or more independent power producers selected through a competitive process. The second program, the green options partners program, will see SaskPower introduce a standing offer to purchase up to 50 megawatts of renewable power from the private sector developers across Saskatchewan. Up to 25 megawatts of that total may come from wind. This expansion of wind power will reduce the corporation's carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 225 000 tonnes per year.

Mr. Speaker, this is a significant commitment to renewable energy by a province that is already leading the way in this area. Currently SaskPower can generate 172 megawatts of wind power — about 5 per cent of its capacity — and it's double the national average of 2.3 per cent. Thanks to programs announced today, wind power will increase to about 8.5 per cent of SaskPower's total generating capacity.

[14:15]

Mr. Speaker, SaskPower's wind power integration and development unit considered a number of operational, environmental, and economic factors before determining its system could accommodate additional megawatts of wind power at this time. SaskPower will continue to proceed carefully to fully understand the impact of this new wind generation on the provincial electrical system in order to ensure reliability for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this government is announcing the expansion during an unprecedented public discussion about Saskatchewan's energy future. SaskPower is at the centre of these discussions. As the Assembly knows, the corporation faces a daunting task of replacing aging infrastructure and keeping up with the supply-demand picture. During the next few years, it must renew aging infrastructure while meeting the demands of a growing economy and tougher environmental regulations.

Mr. Speaker, it's a tall order and the corporation is receiving no shortage of advice on how to meet the challenges it faces. The Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies has heard from a number of presenters with various opinions on how to make it happen.

One common theme Saskatchewan residents seem to agree on is that secure, sustainable, and affordable and clean power is a goal worth pursuing. This is an objective shared by the Government of Saskatchewan. With programs like the ones introduced today, this government is ensuring SaskPower plans for our energy future in an analytical, systemic manner ensuring the province has a safe, reliable supply of electricity well into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition has been urging the Sask Party on this front for the past two years. We were once, not long ago, leaders in this province as it relates to wind power and in fact other jurisdictions were looking to us for some of the technology, some of the capacity that we had developed. In very short order under this government we've become laggards and in big ways, Mr. Speaker.

So the last two years, while this government has been focusing on other plans — spending huge resources, \$3 million and an entire year, an exhaustive process to look at unpractical and expensive nuclear options — they could've been pursuing on this front here. And I guess I'd say at this point in time, we'd be at a different stage at this point in time had that government had the political leadership and the political will that it should've had two years ago. In fact we'd be looking about where we could be stretching to and where we could be reaching as opposed to something very modest, which is eight and a half per cent of our grid.

Jurisdictions around the world, Mr. Speaker, and utilities around the world are pushing limits on this front and are finding all sorts of economic gains within their own communities as a result of this. We can look to Idaho or Minnesota down into the United States. We can look here in Canada. Even our neighbours, Alberta, have advanced on this front. And certainly Ontario has put forward an aggressive new strategy that we should be watching. So I guess on this front we certainly welcome finally, finally this government moving on renewable power in this province.

One thing that we are interested in and concerned about is that this government, when they look at options for power generation, the only option they're looking at, the sole option is

private purchase agreements — private power, Mr. Speaker. We know that SaskPower has served Saskatchewan people and communities and families so incredibly well for so many years and it should be doing that into the future, Mr. Speaker, so we're going to continue to watch this on this front. I know that there's been partnerships that we've struck in the past in a pragmatic way about bringing about capacity for specific projects. But this government seems to be solely focused on one generation, and that's private power.

So we're going to challenge this government on that front, because it's not always in Saskatchewan people's best interests. And what is in Saskatchewan people's best interest is to make sure we have safe, clean, renewable power here in this province and to make sure that SaskPower is strong and viable going into the future.

Mr. Speaker, this announcement should have occurred two years ago. That being said, we'll take it here today. We're going to continue to push and urge this government to move forward. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REINSTATEMENT OF BILLS

Bill No. 80 — *The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2009*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that pursuant to rule 80, Bill No. 80, *The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2009* be reinstated to the order paper. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour has moved that, pursuant to rule no. 80, Bill No. 80, *The Construction Industry Labour Relations Amendment Act, 2009* be now reinstated. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

ADDRESS IN REPLY

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the address in reply which was moved by the Hon. Mr. McMorris, seconded by Ms. Ross, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Lingenfelter.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood.

Mr. Hart: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly pleased to make a few more comments on the reply to

the Throne Speech. Last evening the time was short and I have a few more comments that I would like to add.

When we reached the adjournment time, I was talking about some of the recent developments in the agricultural commodity markets. I mentioned China's latest position on not accepting canola seed from any exporter that could not guarantee that it was 100 per cent free from blackleg, which is something that's impossible. There isn't an exporting nation in the world that could do that.

I have said that EU [European Union] has placed a 25 per cent tariff on durum exports, even though one of their countries, Italy's production is much below average and they will be required to import increased supplies of durum. The reason I raise these issues is to demonstrate what is happening in the international commodity markets this year and in recent years.

At one time, Mr. Speaker, commodity markets would seek a price discovery through the traditional fundamentals of supply and demand, looking at stocks-to-use ratios, those sorts of things. And traders would buy, and sellers and buyers of the commodity would use that information to determine a fair price.

It seems as though in recent years a number of changes have taken place in the commodity markets. Large funds take positions in the markets as hedges against inflation and opportunities to generate income for their fund holders, and so on. And the traditional, quite often at least in the short term, the traditional rules no longer seem to work. And the mechanisms don't seem to work. Quite often things will happen that are by and large unexplainable by the fundamentals of the marketplace.

And that is true not only for agricultural markets, I believe — although that is the area where I have the most experience in — but by observing other commodity markets, whether it be oil, gas, gold, silver, or potash, I believe the same sort of uncertainty and turmoil exists in the world markets today.

We've heard a lot of members opposite talking about the shortfall in the potash revenue projection that was included in this year's budget. And it seems to me though, I think we need to put some things in context. This province is only one of two provinces that will have a truly balanced budget at the end of this fiscal year. And that is something that we should not take lightly if we view what has happened in the world international financial markets.

And, Mr. Speaker, that was driven home to me earlier this year when I had the opportunity to attend a two-week seminar in Westminster, the 58th Seminar on Parliamentary Practice and Procedure at Westminster in London, England. We had at that seminar . . . And I believe there's a few members here in the past had the opportunity to attend that seminar. And I must say it was certainly a privilege to be able to attend the seminar and be part of the delegation representing Saskatchewan at that occasion.

But we had presenters, Mr. Speaker, from government, from opposition, from the financial industry. And we spent a couple of hours one afternoon listening to presenters asking questions and having a discussion on the financial crisis that the world at

that time was in the midst of. And the world is slowly working its way out of it.

But it really drives home — at least it did to me — when you have former heads of banks, of some of the largest banks in the world, tell us that England was a matter of weeks away from a complete financial meltdown, and that if it hadn't have been for the major government bailouts that took place in that country . . . And England wasn't the only country that did that. The US [United States], I'm sure we all would know about the major financial bailouts that the US undertook along with many other developed countries around the world.

We in Canada were somewhat fortunate. But our federal government had to step up to the plate to ensure that we didn't see this worldwide massive breakdown. So if you view what has taken place in Saskatchewan in that context, Mr. Speaker, I think we can say that we are very fortunate to be in this province, and that the Minister of Finance has done an excellent job in managing the financial affairs of this province, Mr. Speaker. So let's put things in context, Mr. Speaker.

Having said that, I would like to address one or two items that are contained in this year's Speech from the Throne. And one of them is a renewed commitment to increasing the number of child care spaces across this province. And, Mr. Speaker, you would think that as a representative of a rural constituency with the largest community of barely 850 people that you would think that it may not be an issue. Well it is, Mr. Speaker. I have had a number of calls to my office about daycare spaces in the communities in my constituency. And through the good work and with the help of the Minister of Education, we were able to provide increased . . . or daycare spaces period, the first of them in the community of Strasbourg.

The work is ongoing and it is something that is vitally needed, not only in the urban centres but also in the rural centres of our province, because it is part of the new infrastructure in a modern province. It's as important as water and sewer and all those sorts of things because of the dynamics of the family structure where it's common for both parents to be working. And we need quality care for our children.

Another issue that was raised in the Throne Speech is the issue of wind power. And we just heard the Minister Responsible for SaskPower, the Minister of Energy and Resources, tell us about the new initiative that SaskPower is undertaking to increase wind power capacity. And the reason I would like to raise this issue is because I have a First Nations community in my constituency who is very, very interested in wind power. They partnered with a major player in the wind power industry and they are looking forward to opportunities to participate in this industry.

I'd like to tell you a little bit of a story of the Gordon First Nation. That happens to be the First Nation that is very interested and active in the wind power. During the last election campaign — November of 2007 — I was on my way to one of the communities in the constituency and my cellphone rang. And I have to admit I didn't stop although there was hardly anyone on the road. And it was at that time a band councillor phoned and asked and wanted to know what the Saskatchewan Party's position was with First Nations economic development.

So I explained to him that we were certainly interested in partnering with them and creating economic development. And he said, well that's exactly what he was looking at. He says, I'm going to vote for you.

[14:30]

Well Ken Sinclair went on to be the chief of the Gordon First Nation. So whenever we're at a public function, he relates that story. And most recently I was at a ceremonial signing of a treaty land entitlement that they had concluded. And Chief Sinclair related the story and he said that he voted for me. And so then I was called upon to be the next speaker. So I said to the chief and the members present, I said, well I know where one of the four votes that I received from your First Nations community. And he had, he along with his band members, had a great chuckle out of that and we ended up having a good day there.

So I am certainly pleased to see the initiative that our government has taken on wind power and I know that the Gordon First Nation is certainly also pleased.

The last issue that I'd like to speak about very briefly is the commitment to lowering the surgical wait times. That was one of the main, major planks in our Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker. And we all, I'm sure, have dealt with constituents who have long waits for elective surgery. We know the frustration and the pain that they've gone through. We've seen, in some cases, the addiction to painkillers, of morphine and that sort of thing — that additional complication that people have to deal with. And so I believe when we look at the average surgical wait times which in many cases are 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, to set a goal of a surgical wait time of no longer than three months, that's a pretty bold initiative, Mr. Speaker.

So the members opposite, I've heard them say that there aren't many new initiatives in the Throne Speech, and so on, but there are some major initiatives, Mr. Speaker. And I would conclude by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I will be certainly supporting the main motion and not supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider it a great honour to be invited to rise in this honourable Assembly to reply to the 2009 Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, in this growing province of more than 1 million people, only 58 of us enjoy this privilege. And I'm proud to be one of them, chosen by the constituents of Thunder Creek to represent them in this Assembly. And represent them I will, Mr. Speaker.

Some of the members in this Assembly have made great personal and financial sacrifices to be here — to be here representing the people of the province and their constituencies. That doesn't make us particularly unique, Mr. Speaker, as there are many more people out there willing to make similar sacrifices in our places.

This privilege of representing our peers is one that we must

earn, Mr. Speaker, and continue to earn. I will continue to endeavour to earn the privilege by representing the views of my constituents to government, not by representing the views of government to my constituents.

I'm proud to be sent to this place by the hard-working, independent people of Thunder Creek, who want nothing more than responsible and less intrusive government. And they won't support NDP-style, intrusive, big brother government and legislation, and they expect that I won't either, Mr. Speaker. They want to be part of a government that is more responsible and less intrusive — the kind of government that we promised the people of Saskatchewan, and the kind of government, Mr. Speaker, that I believe authored this 2009 Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Speaker, let me touch on a few of the areas that I am particularly proud of in this Speech from the Throne, and areas that my constituents particularly appreciate. Few, if any, constituencies in this province are more agricultural than is Thunder Creek. And so, Mr. Speaker, I will begin my specific remarks with the direction that this Speech from the Throne sets for agriculture and with some of the accomplishments that have already been achieved in agriculture by this government.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to moving forward by making support for our agricultural industry a priority through reforming crop insurance, support for our cattle and hog producers when they were so badly in need of it, and improving service to our producers. Mr. Speaker, our government believes that agriculture's contribution to our economy is a direct result of the hard work of Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers and their families, the constituents of Thunder Creek and many, many more.

Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers, Mr. Speaker, are the world's largest exporters of canola, flax, lentils, peas, and durum wheat, and have the largest herds of beef cows, bison, and elk in Canada. Saskatchewan has made a name for itself as a reliable supplier of quality agricultural products, and we can thank our producers for that.

We've been moving forward on such initiatives as launching a review of crop insurance that was focused on ways to improve the program from the perspective of our agricultural producers. From that review, our government made the largest-ever contribution to crop insurance by any Saskatchewan government. Our government's \$20 million increase to crop insurance brought the program's budget to \$155 million, Mr. Speaker. The result of this investment is better coverage and lower premiums for our producers.

We are also making sure that our producers have better service by moving AgriStability's head office to Melville and assuming responsibility from the federal government for administering the program. This new office in Melville will begin operating in 2010, as it will begin by processing 2009 applications. Moving the administration to Saskatchewan will result in approximately 10 new jobs at the Crop Insurance head office in Melville and 30 new jobs at Crop Insurance offices throughout rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, bringing AgriStability to Saskatchewan will

provide our producers with . . .

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — Order. I think I need to remind members, well I have attempted to . . . But specifically rule 46 and (1) in our *Rules and Procedures* which all members of this Assembly worked to establish, says, "Members shall refrain from loud private conversations." I would ask members to observe that rule and allow those on their feet to be able to speak. I recognize the member from Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, bringing AgriStability to Saskatchewan will provide our producers with faster, more reliable, and more responsive service to assist with moving agribusiness in Saskatchewan forward.

Mr. Speaker, we've also taken a more co-operative approach to working with the federal government — a breath of fresh air to our producers, Mr. Speaker. Our government, with the co-operation of the federal government, was able to provide \$101 million in new provincial funding for the Growing Forward agreement with the federal government, investing 152 million over five years to improve the province's water infrastructure program.

The purpose behind the Growing Forward agreement is to support a profitable and innovative agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products industry. Mr. Speaker, the Growing Forward program is going to help farmers make sound business decisions and capture market opportunities and is targeted at farmers interested in starting or expanding agribusiness ventures or improving their existing business practices.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward on the agricultural file in many ways. Among them, our government invested \$71 million in the Saskatchewan cattle and hog support program. Under this program, ranchers receive \$40 per head for beef cows, \$20 per market hog, and \$10 per weanling or feeder pig. This program will help ensure that our agricultural economy will continue to create opportunities in rural Saskatchewan.

We have also moved forward in responding to long-term drought issues in southwest Saskatchewan. Once again, in co-operation with the federal government, we have established the farm and ranch water infrastructure program in which we have invested \$29 million, and which program has since been expanded province-wide, Mr. Speaker.

This program will support the development of secure water sources in Saskatchewan to expand the livestock industry, encourage rural economic activity, and mitigate the effects of future droughts. The funding will go towards community wells, large diameter and small diameter wells on farms and ranches, shallow or deep buried pipelines, and dugouts. This program will help producers have stable sources of water so that they can be more productive and competitive, even in dry times.

Mr. Speaker, our government is making it easier for farmers to expand their operations and to make it easier for them to own land. Many will remember when the Minister of Agriculture announced last year a new five-year program that provides incentives for producers to purchase their leased agricultural

Crown land. Agricultural Crown land has been sold to producers since 1947, but this type of incentive program has never before been offered in the province.

This new program offers leases on a sliding scale, Mr. Speaker, a sliding scale incentive for purchase, beginning with a 10 per cent discount on the sale price of land in the first year, 8 per cent discount in the second year, 6 per cent discount in the third year, and 4 per cent, Mr. Speaker, in the fourth year, and a 2 per cent discount in the fifth year.

This will help create a plan for lasting and permanent economic growth for the producer by returning the direction of agricultural economy to the people who actually work the land, Mr. Speaker.

Our government provided and continues to support the gopher control program, saving thousands of agricultural acres from total devastation, Mr. Speaker.

And finally on the agricultural file, Mr. Speaker, this government has provided the largest property tax reduction on farm land in the history of our province, something that has been promised, but not delivered, by every premier and every government since Tommy Douglas.

Mr. Speaker, societies need strong economies so that they can provide a better standard of living and better services to their people and so that they can help those less fortunate than many of us here today. Our government has delivered more progress on the social side in two years than the previous NDP government did in 16.

Mr. Speaker, while the NDP and their new leader are looking backward, Saskatchewan is continuing to grow, and we're looking forward. Rather than paint a picture of gloom and doom, and cheerlead for the recession as those members do, Mr. Speaker, our government is making sure that the province's growth benefits everyone. This means keeping Saskatchewan affordable, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at affordable housing, we see an area where the NDP ignored the problem for years, and we had to act. That's why we created the task force on housing affordability, to make sure that affordability keeps pace with our growing economy.

Since the task force tabled its report, we've acted on 22 of its 36 recommendations. For example, the task force showed that recipients of income assistance were one of the groups hit hardest by the crisis in housing affordability. The previous government should have known this, Mr. Speaker, but they did not increase shelter allowances once from 1992 to 2005. That's 13 years, Mr. Speaker. Our government responded by providing over \$12 million to adjust shelter rates in the income assistance programs and to index shelter allowances at 70 per cent of average market rents.

This enhancement immediately benefited over 6,000 households across this province, Mr. Speaker. For example a Saskatoon family with one or two children receiving benefits under the SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] or TEA [transitional employment allowance] programs and the SHRS [Saskatchewan housing rental supplement] program saw an

increase in their shelter allowance of up to \$189 a month. A single person with a disability saw a monthly increase of up to \$126.

In today's reality many seniors live on fixed incomes. When prices go up, Mr. Speaker, their incomes do not necessarily follow suit. Mr. Speaker, that is why we are looking out for seniors on fixed incomes. We've more than doubled the support available to low-income seniors through the seniors' income plan and we've doubled the number of seniors that qualify for it.

We're helping people build brighter futures within our growing economy by increasing training opportunities and supports for people in training. We've created the Aboriginal Workforce Development Fund, Mr. Speaker. This will support new employment initiatives aimed at increasing First Nations and Métis participation in the workforce. We increased the provincial training allowance in August 2008. Then we did it again in March 2009, and to make sure it goes up when your cost of living goes up, Mr. Speaker, we've also indexed it. That's progress, Mr. Speaker.

[14:45]

We've invested over \$75 million into programs for people with disabilities, including spending on capital projects like \$100,000 for the purchase of a property in Langenburg to build a group home for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

This also included changes in the way that we calculate support payments for people in need. For example we eliminated the 2008 tax refund from the income calculation for the SAP and TEA programs, the new income support program for people with disabilities. That means that low-income people with disabilities will not be penalized for receiving tax refunds.

We also created an exemption in the way that we calculate social assistance rates so that people with disabilities or their families can better invest in the registered disability savings plan and save for their long-term financial security.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring equal opportunity for all residents of Saskatchewan is the foundation of this government, and we're proud to help people with disabilities move forward within our growing economy. The best way for us to make sure Saskatchewan stays affordable is to let the people of this province, especially low-income people, keep more money in their own pockets.

We've brought in the largest income tax reduction in Saskatchewan history, Mr. Speaker. As part of this, we've increased the basic personal exemption by \$4,000 which means, Mr. Speaker, that 80,000 low-income people who previously paid provincial income tax will not have to pay any this year.

We also introduced a number of new tax credits. Combined, these measures will save a family of four over \$1,300 each year. Mr. Speaker, that means that a typical family of four will get better tax exemptions in Saskatchewan than anywhere else in Canada. This tax cut will help keep more money in parents' pockets so they can focus more of their time on their children.

We're moving forward on the social front, Mr. Speaker, and we're making sure that the province's growth benefits everyone in Saskatchewan. This is substantially more progress, Mr. Speaker, during the two years of our government than the NDP made in the 16 years of theirs. And for several of those years, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was either a cabinet minister or a deputy premier.

Mr. Speaker, in the past year, Saskatchewan's population has grown by 16,000 people. That represents faster growth than at any time since the 1950s. And Saskatchewan continues to have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, while Regina and Saskatoon both have the lowest unemployment rates among major Canadian cities.

Mr. Speaker, the debt has been paid down by over 40 per cent since the election of our government. And we have instituted the largest property and income tax reductions in the history of the province, removing over 80,000 low-income people from the income tax rolls altogether and reducing taxes for every woman and man in the province.

What has changed, Mr. Speaker? Well in the dark old days of the NDP, the economy was dominated by government. Economic investment decisions were either made or dominated by government. In other words, politics played the largest role in economic decision making, leading to boondoggles like Coachman Insurance that cost taxpayers 16.1 million; Channel Lake that cost 15 million; tappedinto.com at 6.7 million; Persona at 9.4 million; Navigata at 90 million; NST [NST Network Services of Chicago] at \$16 million; Clickabid at 1.9 million; Soft Tracks at 2.2 million; Ag Dealer at 8.9 million; Guyana at 2 million; ISC [Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan] at about 120 million; Meadow Lake Pulp at about 800 million; mega bingo at 8 million; Broe industries ethanol deal, 750,000, and we only got off that lucky because absolutely nothing was ever done on that site; Pangaea at 3.5 million.

And, Mr. Speaker, the list of the NDP's politically inspired losses of taxpayers' dollars goes on to total well in excess of \$1 billion.

Our government, Mr. Speaker, has taken the politics out of economic development decisions through establishing Enterprise Saskatchewan to assume the role of recommending those directions to government from their solid base as leaders in our economy. No more under this dynamic model will the course of least political resistance be the driver for economic development, and no more risking billions of taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, it's working. And I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Enterprise Saskatchewan board, the sector teams, the strategic issues councils, and the good men and women who work in the agency itself and around the province in the economic regions who are the boots on the ground in all of our economic development projects. That is what has changed, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our government is turning this province around from have not to have, from lagging to leading, from dismal to brilliant. Those members in the NDP said Saskatchewan could never do it. And they didn't want us to succeed, Mr. Speaker.

But we are succeeding in spite of them, and we will succeed regardless of them. And regardless of what kind of personal, spite filled, 1970s-style opposition they mount, we will succeed because the people of this province are depending on us to succeed. And accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this Speech from the Throne.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Lakeview.

Mr. Nilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak in favour of the amendment to the Throne Speech and against the motion of the government.

But before I start with that, I want to congratulate a few people. The first person I'd like to congratulate is the member from Douglas Park. He is somebody who brings his experience from this legislature and from his involvement in Saskatchewan, but also his involvement in the business world back to the people of Saskatchewan. And so I want to thank the member of Douglas Park for making the commitment to the people of Saskatchewan. And I know that all Saskatchewan citizens will appreciate the kind of advice and the role that he will provide. I'd like to say that I have known about and known Dwain for over 30 years now, and I think that in everything that he's done, he's done it with passion. And I think that's what we're going to see here and I know we'll all appreciate that.

I'd also like to congratulate the new member from Riversdale, and I know that she is also bringing some very unique and important gifts to this place. And I'm looking forward to the kinds of issues that she brings forward, but also the keen insight that she also brings into how to solve the problems of Saskatchewan. Because that's why we all get elected, is to solve problems for the people of Saskatchewan.

I'd also like to thank Harry Van Mulligen, the former member from Douglas Park. I first met Harry almost 30 years ago — I think 28 years ago — when he phoned up and said, I want to help you, John, deliver meals on wheels to some of the seniors in Regina. And I got to know him over the couple of hours that we delivered meals that first day and then on subsequent days, and I've worked with him through thick and thin over many years. And I want to just say on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, thank you very much, Harry, for all the good work that you've done.

I'd also like to thank the constituents in Lakeview for returning me to this legislature for a fourth time and for the kinds of advice that they give me. I live here in the neighbourhood of the legislature, and much of the information and the insight and the perspective that I receive about what's happening in this place, I pick up when I walk the streets of Lakeview, when I go to the Golden Mile, when I go to the Southland Mall, when I go into the various shops. Because people will stop and tell me how important certain things are to them and also how they are concerned about many things that are happening.

I also want to thank the members of my family — Linda, Ingrid, and Solveig — for their continued support, and also for all of my family across the province of Saskatchewan who continue to provide guidance and advice.

A couple years ago now — it seems like it's not that long ago in one sense, but it is a while — we had the first Throne Speech of this new government. And then subsequently in the spring of '08, we had the budget. And at that point, I talked about the uneasiness that I was picking up from the people of Saskatchewan about the direction of this new government.

And there was a story or an image that I laid out about a bus that was going down a road, and it felt as if there wasn't a driver at the wheel. Now I think, Mr. Speaker, that over the last three or four months we've realized that maybe that image wasn't so far off and that things are in a situation where we've got a whole bunch of passengers, but we don't have a driver, we don't have a plan. We have people talking about, well, hope here, hope there. But as far as a plan, we don't have it.

And, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately this Throne Speech, which has in its title the whole fact of going forward, doesn't seem to go forward at all. It looks back at many things that have happened over the last couple of decades, but there's very little in this Throne Speech that sets out where this government wants to take the people of Saskatchewan. And that's concerning in many ways.

So I would say the kind of mood that I'm picking up from the people in Saskatchewan this fall, as opposed to last year when there was uneasiness, I think the mood I'm picking up this year is people are worried. They're very worried. And they're concerned that the Government of Saskatchewan has not taken into their knowledge base the kinds of things that are happening around them.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, that there's a new book that came out on October 10th — and many people know I enjoy reading books — but there's a new book that came out on October 10th written by a woman called Barbara Ehrenreich. And she's quite a prominent writer and columnist; she writes for a number of magazines. This book is called *Bright-Sided*, and it's a play on the words blindsided. But the book is about the fact that there are all these kinds of people who are cheerleaders, who are so optimistic that they get bright-sided. They go forward with all of these perspectives that are so sunny, so smiley, that all of a sudden they're hit when things don't go their way.

And I know that there's an interesting quote that she gave in an interview on October the 10th, when this book just was coming out. And she was asked:

How does an upbeat workplace serve the interests of the corporate world?

Well, I don't think that it has served them too well! Nobody wanted to be the person who came to the boss and said, "I'm really worried about our subprime exposure with the mortgage company or bank." And so the culture of self-delusion that permeated corporate America fed into the financial meltdown in 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I think that some of what we're seeing across the floor in this House is this self-delusion about where we're going and what we're doing.

[15:00]

And I think this is why people in Saskatchewan are very worried about what's going to happen to our province. Because we have a whole number of people whose response in question period, whose response to reporters at different events is oh, things are going really well, have never gone better, when there's a whole number of people within our province who are really hurting.

And when you end up with somebody who basically has a response to trouble as just, well let's grin and bear it, let's cheer all the good things — then you know that you've got a problem. Mr. Speaker, we're looking for people who have plans, not who just sort of cheerlead hope. Because we know that if you don't have appropriate plans, then you're going to get in trouble.

Mr. Speaker, many of us a few weeks ago were looking forward to coming to the session this fall to see and hear the Throne Speech. And I guess when I was listening in the Chamber last week — or yes, I guess last week — my sense was that what we were getting was thin gruel as opposed to a nice cream porridge because there was really not much there. Now it might, it might allow for our community to continue, but I think, Mr. Speaker, that what's happening here in our community is that there's a whole number of people who have been in a situation where they've received some very generous opportunities to manage a whole amount of money.

It brings me back to some of my previous career as a lawyer in private practice and as a mediator. And one of the types of cases that I spent a lot of time working on was businesses, farms that were in financial trouble, and I provided advice to them. And, Mr. Speaker, my sense is that this government is not dissimilar to that family business that's moving on to the next generation, where there's a son who doesn't quite have the drive, doesn't quite have the ability, doesn't quite have the skills as the father and mother who have built the business, and they're given a business either through an inheritance with a death or through some plan of transfer between parents and children. And all of a sudden they have control of all this money, and they're not totally certain what to do, but they're going to pretend like they know what they're doing.

And so all of a sudden you have a situation where they're burning up cash, and more cash is going out the door than is coming in the door. And after about 18 months, they end up going to their accountant or to their lawyer because some of the bankers or some of the creditors or other places are starting to say, hey, there's something not good here. Well that's the kind of situation I used to get involved in on a regular basis, to try to sort out what were you going to do with this particular business.

Now I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that there were some times when there was no answer because there wasn't the skill or the ability of the people leading the company, the new generation, to actually understand how to get themselves out. Other times it was possible to fix things. Most often the best course was to get rid of that management, whether they were family or not, and bring in somebody who actually knew what they were doing.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think we're getting close to the point where the people of Saskatchewan are going to want to have a chance to get rid of this self-congratulatory, pompom-bearing, cheerleader-type crew and get somebody back in place who

knows how to manage this province. And, Mr. Speaker, that ends up being the kind of reason that people are so worried about what's going on right now. And we're in a situation where the financial management seemed to be okay until all of a sudden we get a bright sided or blindsided perspective as it relates to the revenues of the province.

Now if we'd had a situation where we had a government in place that was careful about what kinds of expenditures they've increased, we might have been in a better position than we are now. But it's not dissimilar to that example I gave of the son or daughter who inherits the family business and they increase the expenses — whether it's new cars, new houses, toys, those kinds of things — and then all of a sudden realize the cash isn't there.

It's not dissimilar to that the kind of situation that we're in now because frankly I don't think the public totally understands that there's been around a 30 per cent increase in the expenditures in the budget of the province of Saskatchewan. And it's the kind of increase that surprises many people when you talk about it because they expected something better from the crew that were elected in November of 2007.

Now unfortunately we're now in a situation where the accountability or the accounting has to take place, and I'm hoping for all of us in Saskatchewan that we will get some responsibility from the members opposite. And that will not happen until they get out of this sunny, bright side, cheerleading type of activity and then they get back to providing us with clear examples and clear plans as to what they're going to do for the province. Now, Mr. Speaker, this Throne Speech I had hoped would be that document. Unfortunately it doesn't do that at all, and it's a sad commentary on the kind of planning that comes forward.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on May 12th in this Chamber, we were doing the estimates for the Executive Council and for the Premier. And at that evening I asked two questions of the Premier, and it's quite interesting, Mr. Speaker, about those questions and what happens here.

The first question, the gist of it was . . . and I won't go into the long *Hansard* account, but if you want to go and look in *Hansard* you can read that. But the gist of the question is, how is this government going to manage the finances of the province when they're spending so much more than what we were able to afford? And so I asked them, are you going to take money from the Crowns and raise utility rates? Are you going to raise taxes? Or are you going to move money from other places to try to cover-up the costs that were there? And, Mr. Speaker, I'd have to say that the answer that I got then wasn't very satisfactory and, Mr. Speaker, I think it's even less satisfactory now.

And curiously enough the second question that I asked that night was about the whole issue of waiting lists. And, Mr. Speaker, and I think I will quote this one because I said I had a simple question for the Premier:

Waiting lists in health care for surgery have been a huge issue, and on December 2007, the number of people on the waiting list was approximately 26,000. And now at December 2008, the most recent information on the public

waiting list, it's gone up by 1,000 instead of going down. Can the Premier explain why, after all the ranting and raving about waiting lists and health care and everything else, you've been in government for 18 months, and the waiting lists have gone up?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I went onto the website this morning and looked, and the most recent number says — as of June 30th, 2009 — 27,600 patients are waiting for surgery, 200 more than at the end of March. And, Mr. Speaker, when is the September 30th data going to come into place because it's supposed to be on here every three months? I think that the concern of the Premier around this particular information is well-founded but, Mr. Speaker, where are the plans? What are they going to do? And I think that we have not seen or heard that kind of information on that very specific issue. We've set out some goals.

The other curious thing in the Premier's response was the fact that he attacked the whole point of targets. Now I don't know what setting a three-month time limit in this Throne Speech for getting your surgery is, but I think it's a target. But here, let me quote the Premier as he talks about targets and the environmental date. And I think he talks about something called targetitis. And he says that as a government we were not interested in targets or we were trying to set targets.

Mr. Speaker, I think that this confusion around how the government plans to deal with waiting lists, how they plan to deal with the finances of the province, how they plan to deal with the issues of pulling back money for projects that the local people are expecting, all of these things are creating a great deal of confusion and, I think, worry. And so, Mr. Speaker, I think the word in response to this Throne Speech is to say the people are worried. What are your plans? What are you going to do? We haven't seen anything here that's going to solve that. Let's get some clear ideas and clear options so that we, as the people of Saskatchewan, can understand what you're going to try to do.

Now we've heard some of this same kind of confusion in response to the plans for the H1N1 epidemic that is here in North America.

Mr. Speaker, I think that what everybody wants is to know how these people are going to run our government, how they're going to be responsible for the resources that we have, and how they are going to set out a plan for the next two years because, Mr. Speaker, I think it's going to be quite clear on November 7, 2011, that people will be tired of the kind of leadership that we've seen — or lack of leadership or cheerleading leadership or whatever you want to call it — because the public does not want to be bright sided.

They don't want to be in a situation where all of the hard work that we've all done together over a couple of decades to deal with all the problems in the '80s, none of the people of Saskatchewan want to lose that kind of result that we have in our economy, in our community. And, Mr. Speaker, we did that kind of work all together as a community. And we need to know that the members opposite are operating in the same way. So far we haven't seen that, and so I say the response to this Throne Speech is increased worry and uneasiness multiplied

two or three times. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to be voting for the amendment and against the motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Agriculture and the member from Saltcoats.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to get up and respond to the Throne Speech. But before I start, I just want to mention and congratulate the member for Riversdale. I wish her many years of good times in the legislature here and wish her all the best.

And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Leader of the Opposition although on by-election night I'm sure there was a time there when the vote was very close that they were looking for Harry — where's Harry? I think we need him — far closer than you would think with the leader of a party.

[15:15]

Mr. Speaker, just before I get into some of the issues I want to talk about today, I just want to mention my colleagues on this side of the House. Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, as we know is a very large portfolio, and it certainly isn't one that a person can rely on information all by yourself. And I really want to acknowledge the support that I've got from every member on this side of the House. I get some very good advice from all the rural members — remembering of course, Mr. Speaker, I believe we represent every rural riding in the province of Saskatchewan. And that's not by accident; I think that was by design by the people of the province.

I also want to thank my urban colleagues in here because they're free with their advice quite often, Mr. Speaker — not always heeded, but taken very well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the constituency of Melville-Saltcoats and thank the voters out there for giving me the opportunity to represent them again.

But a lot of good things happening out there, Mr. Speaker; Mr. Speaker, good things happening right across the province, but I think the one thing that I've noticed the most in Melville-Saltcoats is the optimism that we see out there. And I noticed yesterday that my colleague from Canora-Pelly had some numbers out where school enrolment is finally starting to turn around and come back. I believe that's the first time in 17 years we've seen that. And for rural Saskatchewan, for all of Saskatchewan, that's probably the most optimistic sign we can see, when there's young families moving back and staying in the province and having their kids here and raising their families here. And, Mr. Speaker, that's not only good for this year; that's going to bode well for the future and the long-term future of this province.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency I'm very fortunate to have some potash mines, and there's a couple of mine expansions going on out there right now. And we know there's a bit of tough times in the potash industry but we've been there before. That's happened on a number of occasions over the years. In fact I go back to the years that I worked in the mine at K-1 at Esterhazy, and the same thing went on then when they were

trying to get a contract with possibly China at that time and India and some of the other countries that are large importers of potash. And we'll get through this, and when we do we're positioned in an excellent position for this province to go forward and potash to play an ever-increasing role in the revenues of this province.

I also want to join with my colleague from Yorkton, Mr. Speaker. We have two new canola crushing plants going up. Louis Dreyfus, Mitsui just started taking canola — bodes well for the future of agriculture in that area, especially in the canola industry — and Richardson International who is also under construction and will be taking canola into the new year.

Mr. Speaker, every community in the Melville-Saltcoats constituency, its biggest problem right now is infrastructure. And we've tried to help them with extra dollars that we, along with the federal government, have put into a number of projects out there. But it's a great problem to have. We see every small town and even the city of Melville, their biggest concern is finding enough places for people to live. And that's a good sign. We haven't seen that for many, many years in rural Saskatchewan but I think it has a little bit to do with the optimism we see right across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a few minutes today and just talk about some of the things we've done in agriculture. And you know, Mr. Speaker, it was a great opportunity to become government because agriculture and rural Saskatchewan had been neglected for so long, there were so many things we could turn to and start to do. And I want to list off some of them today, Mr. Speaker.

Really, the NDP left the door open. They kind of opened that door by paying no attention to rural Saskatchewan and really not caring what happened to agriculture, because of course under their watch they really didn't care if agriculture survived because they didn't really feel that agriculture played an important part in this province. And as you and I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one out of every four, one out of every five jobs rely on agriculture in this province, even though the oil industry is doing well and the potash industry is going to come back very shortly and we're so resource rich in this province and so many good things are happening out there. But when the buck stops it still comes back to the farm gate. And farm families across this province play such a big part in what goes on in our province.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday for an example . . . And we've worked very closely with the industry and SARM and organizations like that, Mr. Speaker, but the cattle guys, the cowboys were in here yesterday and worked very well with us. We haven't solved all their problems. I would certainly be the first to say that. There's tough times out there in the cattle industry and the hog industry. But they were in yesterday. Together we announced a \$5 million voluntary traceability rebate program.

And I'm not totally sold on . . . The federal minister seems to think that mandatory traceability is the way to go and we disagree on that. We've agreed to disagree on that. The minister from Alberta thinks that mandatory traceability is the way to go, and they've done that. So normally we get along very well with our colleagues from Alberta, but on this issue we've agreed to

disagree.

But having said that, Mr. Speaker, why we did that announcement yesterday is that if we don't position ourselves in a good position, if the federal government brings down mandatory traceability we're going to get left behind. And I don't want that to happen to our producers because somewhere down the road they may get docked 3, 4, 5 cents a pound because we're not into that program.

So we have to position ourselves for that, and that's why our colleagues, our friends from the cattle industry, were here yesterday showing their support for what we were doing. It's voluntary, as I said, Mr. Speaker, so it's their choice whether they take advantage of this program, but it's there to help them and defray some of the costs.

Because as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and every rural MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] on this side of the House knows, that when government knows what's best for us, the buck always stops at the farm gate. And it's the farmer, the farm family, that ends up picking up the bill for it, even though it was us as government — whether it's federal, provincial, whoever's in power — brings something forward. The buck always stops at the farm gate. And we're trying to soften that blow and not let that happen under our watch, Mr. Speaker.

Another project, Mr. Speaker, and I know the Leader of the Opposition will really be interested in this program because last year we designed it — the FRWIP [farm and ranch water infrastructure program] program for southwest Saskatchewan — mainly because they've had four or five years of drought. And the previous government wouldn't even mention the word drought, let alone do anything about it. So one of the things we did is we brought a water program strictly for about 65, 66 RMs [rural municipality] in the Southwest.

Now did that solve all our problems with the drought, Mr. Speaker? Not at all. But what it did is address some of the water issues they're going to have in the upcoming years. But I'm hoping 20, 30 years from now they're still utilizing some of the wells, on-farm wells, the dugouts, and especially, working again with SARM, the community wells that we're drilling out there will be there for the next 20, 30, 40 years, Mr. Speaker.

And I know the Leader of the Opposition would really like to congratulate us for that because of course he farms down there. I think it was two, three decades ago he represented a seat down there; it was somewhere in the last half a century, Mr. Speaker.

The other issue I want to talk about is one of the biggest issues in rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the education tax reduction on farm land, on ag land out there, whether you're in the ranching area where you have thousands and thousands of acres you're ranching, or whether you're on the grain side.

One of the biggest concerns they've had for many years, and I know they've asked the opposition opposite when they were in government. And I remember the previous premier always going to SARM and saying, the status quo is not on. And a year later he had to go back and say it again because they'd done nothing about it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we haven't been here two years, and we've addressed that issue. We haven't solved it completely, and we're working towards that making it even better, hopefully into the new year, but we've gone a long ways, Mr. Speaker. In many cases, farmers and ranchers are paying about a third of the education tax on farm land that they were just a short few years ago.

Mr. Speaker, that again doesn't solve their problem, but it certainly leaves a few more dollars as they go to pay their taxes now as we come to the year-end. It'll leave a few more dollars in their pocket and, especially on the livestock side, they certainly need that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a few minutes about crop insurance program. And the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition certainly will remember what I'm talking about here. Because if I remember right, in 1992 when the NDP cancelled the GRIP [gross revenue insurance program] program, he was the deputy premier. Pretty influential position to sit in at cabinet, sat at cabinet and must have voted for this change.

I think he was farming at the time. And I find that almost amazing that he would take part in cutting a program such as GRIP. Wasn't the perfect program, but I'll tell you, we haven't seen a program come anywhere as near to addressing some of the issues since that program was in place. And I'm somewhat surprised that the Leader of the Opposition would have voted to cancel that program.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to try . . . And we've done, we've made some changes to crop insurance. In fact some of them were made this summer with the drought in the Kindersley-Rosetown area. I toured the area with my colleague from Kindersley and my colleague from Rosetown, went out there and talked to producers. Met with a number of producers out there where you couldn't even see that a crop had been seeded, it was so dry.

We made some changes out there, especially knowing that there was going to be a feed shortage in the livestock industry, where crop insurance could go out and write the crop off and a neighbour could come in, and if there was some there, they could even bale it up and try and use it for feed. So we kind of tried to balance the spectrum there a little bit and help both sides of the issue. They were in real tough at that point of the year and then they finally started to get a little rain. But it was a little bit too late.

But, Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about the AgriStability transfer. My colleague from Thunder Creek talked about it should be an improvement to the programming when we bring it from Winnipeg back to Melville. But I was amazed yesterday — and I've heard the Leader of the Opposition kind of ridicule this move — but last night the member for Regina Coronation Park laughed right out loud, how stupid of a move this was. He said, oh, is this ever going to improve the program, moving it from one city to another.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're moving it from the province of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, to Melville, Saskatchewan. I would say that's a win for everybody in this province. Number one,

those employees will be living here in Saskatchewan and paying taxes in Saskatchewan. Isn't that a novel idea after all the out-migration we've had over the last 16 years, to actually want to bring more people back to the province of Saskatchewan?

And, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to see a lot of people apply for some of these jobs with a farm background that actually when my colleague from Cypress Hills or anywhere across the province phones in to AgriStability, the person on the end of the phone might have a clue what you're talking about. You know, he'll wonder . . . I've had the opportunity to have a producer call me and say, you know, last year on my AgriStability form I listed 150 bred heifers. And when they phoned in the next year, they got a call from AgriStability and said, well something's wrong here, you didn't list your bred heifers again.

Wasn't the fault of the person on the other end of the phone, but he'd never seen a farm, had no idea what they were talking about. We're going to change that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make that part of the program work far better. And for the members on that side of the House to ridicule a move like that, they better go out and check in rural Saskatchewan, check with farmers and ranchers because they like that move of moving AgriStability back to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the hog industry — and Florian Possberg was in yesterday when we did the traceability announcement and supported that — but the hog industry's in tough, probably tougher shape than any in this whole province right now and have tough times. We've done the targeted advance, the TAP [targeted advance payment] program — 2007, 2008, and now in 2009 — which gives them an advance on what they would get out of the AgriStability program, if they're in a position to receive that. And I think that may help a little bit.

One area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know you're fully aware of this and every rural MLA on this side certainly is, it was the increase in the wildlife damage compensation out there from 80 to 100 per cent. And I heard a little criticism from the Leader of the Opposition the other day in the media saying, well you know, it might be a good thing, and it might be overdue. And I think what he was thinking is they should have done it and really didn't have the gusto to actually do it or, you know what, put the money towards it.

But he was criticizing me for not getting the federal government to cost share in the additional 20 per cent. And I guess I was thinking back when he said that, Mr. Speaker, because I know exactly what they'd have done on that side of the House. They'd have blamed the federal government. We'd still be stuck at 80 per cent compensation.

We didn't do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When we saw we couldn't get it cost shared, the province of Saskatchewan, my colleagues on this side of the House, and the Premier said, we'll fund it. The province of Saskatchewan will fund it. And we'll do what should be done, and we'll fund wildlife compensation damage to the tune of 100 per cent because everybody should pay for the wildlife in this province when they're doing damage.

Mr. Speaker, some of the other things we've done, we had a

loan program for the cattle and hog industry shortly after we were elected and I was named Minister of Agriculture. We actually extended the principal payment for another year to give them a little reprieve there when they're so short of cash out there in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my time's coming to an end here fairly quick. Knowing that, I think within the next while, the Leader of the Opposition, being Ag critic, is going to get up and ask us some ag questions. But before he gets up and asks them, we just want to give him a little refresher course in where he was when he was Deputy Premier because, as I said before, pretty high profile position to be in and do all these things to rural Saskatchewan.

But as I said before, they cut the GRIP program. Anybody remember what they did to our health care system in rural Saskatchewan? They closed 52 hospitals, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Actually that's not quite right — they closed 53 rural hospitals because they closed the Plains out here which was one of the best locations for a hospital in the city that rural Saskatchewan could access. And you know what the NDP did? They closed it on top of it . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And the member opposite is right. They did. They ran many deficits in their years in government. Of course they borrowed from their — well, what did they call it — their rainy day fund, Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

And Mr. Speaker, we all know what that fund amounted to. That was an operating loan, a line of credit. So every time they ran short when they ran a deficit, and they ran a number of them, they borrowed money and up went the provincial debt. Which is something I'm glad the member opposite reminded me of, because we've paid down about a third of the debt in the first two years, Mr. Speaker, something that members opposite never even addressed in 16 years.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, you look at the municipalities right across this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . .

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I recognize the member from Saltcoats.

Hon. Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and why I'm trying to remind the Leader of the Opposition is because he played a big part in what they did to rural Saskatchewan and the neglect they had. And, Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind him, when he gets up to ask questions, to make sure that he's commending us for what we did because in the short two years we've tried to fix a lot of holes that they left behind.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think probably the biggest problem the members opposite are going to have is that doom and gloom and pessimism is not selling across Saskatchewan, whether you live in urban Saskatchewan or rural Saskatchewan. When I go home on the weekends, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see optimism out there; I see people working, making a living, raising families, and looking to the future, not looking in the rear-view mirror. And I think that only bodes well for this province.

[15:30]

I think the NDP have a problem come the next election. Fearmongering, the pessimism they try to sell out there, the doom and gloom — I don't think it works. And I would say after the next election there'll be less even of them on that side of the House and more on this side, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've covered a lot of areas today. I just want to say that I will certainly be supporting the Throne Speech, and I won't be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I start, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments and thank the people that have brought me here. First and foremost on the list of course is my wife, Valerie, who's been at my side and my biggest supporter.

I'd also like to thank my CA [constituency assistant], Mary Anne Telfer, who's been more than just a CA. She's been a close friend and confidant, and I thank her for her support.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot lately from the opposition asking, what's the government done for Duck Lake? This is what our government is doing for Duck Lake: 66,000 from the municipal economic enhancement program; 94,000 in operating grants; 375,000 for a new roof on the interpretive centre; 455,000 to leverage a similar contribution out of the federal Building Canada Fund for water reservoir expansion and treatment plant upgrade, and 13.5 million for a new school. That's our record on Duck Lake, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's pretty strong.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are talking a lot lately about the three recent by-elections but I don't think they're seeing the big picture. These are NDP strongholds, Mr. Speaker. There were supposed to be a cakewalk, but they weren't. Let's take a closer look at the by-election results, Mr. Speaker.

In 2008 the NDP won a seat in the constituency of Cumberland, well short of 200 votes. In just five years their support plummeted in the constituency from 69 per cent in 2003 to 50 per cent in 2008. In that same period our support doubled from 22 per cent in 2003 to 44 per cent in 2008. They sure are building momentum, Mr. Speaker.

Consider Saskatoon Riversdale. In the last by-election the NDP won Saskatoon Riversdale by just over 400 votes. Their support in Saskatoon Riversdale has decreased from 63 per cent in 2003 to only 53 per cent in 2009. Our support has grown from 23 per cent in 2003 to 42 per cent in 2009. Again we have a steady decline, election after election, in their support while ours has increased by 83 per cent over the last three elections. Mr. Speaker, the momentum is continuing to build.

Now the big one, Mr. Speaker, Regina Douglas Park. The NDP hand-picked this riding. They thought it would be an easy win for their new boss. Boy, did they get a shock. In the end they snuck it out by 502 votes, but a win is a win for now. We'll see in 2011. We're moving forward in Regina Douglas Park, Mr.

Speaker. In 2003 we only got 21 per cent of the vote in the riding. In 2007 our share rose to 31 per cent. This year we got 42 per cent. That sounds like momentum, Mr. Speaker.

Do you want to know how the NDP made out this year in Regina Douglas Park? I'll tell you. In 2003 the NDP got over 5,000 votes in Regina Douglas Park. Again in 2007 they received in excess of 5,000 votes. This year, Mr. Speaker, they barely got 3,000. Mr. Speaker, the NDP lost 2,000 supporters in Regina Douglas Park — in their leader's riding — in only two years of office. We're moving forward, Mr. Speaker. They're falling back.

Mr. Speaker, the second thing I want to talk about today is agriculture. Our government is committed to moving forward by making support for agricultural industry a priority. We are reforming crop insurance, providing support for cattle and hog producers, and improving service to our producers.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers produce nearly half of Canada's canola; three-quarters of its flax, mustard, and peas; and more than 80 per cent of its durum and lentils. We also have the second largest beef cow, bison, and elk herds in the country. On top of that, Saskatchewan is also one of the world's largest exporters of flax, lentil, peas, and wheat. Saskatchewan has made a name for itself as a reliable supplier of quality agriculture products, and we can thank our producers for that.

Our government has been moving forward with a number of initiatives aimed at helping our farmers and ranchers. This includes launching a review of crop insurance that was focused on ways to improve the program from the farmers' perspective. From that review, our government made the largest ever contribution to a crop insurance program by a Saskatchewan government. This also includes our government's \$20 million increase to the crop insurance program, Mr. Speaker, that brought the program's budget to \$155 million. The result of this investment is better coverage for producers, and it lowers their premiums.

We're also making sure our producers have better service. This starts by moving AgStability head office to Melville and assuming responsibility from the federal government for the administration of the program. The new office at Melville will begin operating in Saskatchewan in 2010 as it starts processing applications for 2009. This will result in 100 new jobs at the Crop Insurance head office in Melville and 30 new jobs at Crop Insurance offices throughout rural Saskatchewan. On top of that, bringing AgStability to Saskatchewan will provide our producers with more reliable and responsible service to assist with moving the agribusiness forward in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we've also taken a more co-operative approach to working with the federal government. By working together with the federal government, we were able to provide 101 million in new provincial funding for the new Growing Forward agreement with the federal government. Investing 152 million over five years to improve the province's water infrastructure program, the funding will come through cash and program spending.

The purpose behind the Growing Forward agreement is to

support a profitable, innovative agriculture, agri-food, and ag-based products industry. This program, Mr. Speaker, will achieve three strategic outcomes for agriculture in Saskatchewan: a competitive and innovative sector, a sector that contributes to society's priorities, and a sector that is proactive in making risk management.

Mr. Speaker, the Growing Forward program is going to help farmers make sound business decisions and capture market opportunities, and has targeted farmers interested in starting or expanding a new business venture, pursuing a new business opportunity or improving your existing business practice.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward on the agriculture files — for example, our government investment of \$71 million for the Saskatchewan cattle and hog support program. Under the program, ranchers receive \$40 per head for beef cows, \$20 for market hogs, and 10 per weanling or feeder hogs. This program will help to ensure that our agricultural economy will continue to create opportunities in rural Saskatchewan.

We've also moved forward in responding to help alleviate long-term drought issues in southwest Saskatchewan. Once again, in positive co-operation with the federal government, we have established farm and ranch water infrastructure programs, and we have invested \$29 million in it. This program will support the development of secure water sources in Saskatchewan to expand the livestock industry, encourage rural economic activity, and mitigate the effects of future droughts. Most important, Mr. Speaker, it will help producers to have a stable water source so that they can be productive and competitive, even in dry years.

Our government is making it easier for farmers to expand their operations and make it easier for them to own land. Many will remember when the Minister of Agriculture announced last year a new five-year program that provides . . .

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. There's a number of conversations starting to develop. I'm having trouble hearing the member. I recognize the member from Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Many will remember when the Minister of Agriculture announced last year a new five-year program that provides incentives for producers to purchase their leased agricultural Crown land. Agricultural Crown land has been sold to producers since 1947, but this type of incentive program has never before been offered in Saskatchewan. The new program offers lessees, on a sliding scale, incentives for purchase. This will help create a plan for lasting and permanent economic growth for the producer by returning the direction of agricultural economy to the people who work the land. That's moving forward on agriculture, Mr. Speaker. That's a couple of things that we're doing on agriculture, Mr. Speaker. I think it's good progress.

We're really moving forward on agriculture in this province. Despite that, the members opposite have tried to portray themselves as if they are the best choice for agriculture and rural Saskatchewan. Their leader has even appointed himself as their Agriculture critic. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? No

one is going to buy that. No one believes that the member opposite would do anything for agriculture or rural Saskatchewan if they had the chance. In fact, they had the chance for 16 years. And what did they do? I'll tell you what they did. They increased crop insurance premiums, decreased crop insurance coverage. They closed 31 rural offices in one year — 2004. No support for producers in southwest Saskatchewan dealing with consecutive years of drought. No commitment to fully fund the CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] program. Taxpayers' money being used to invest in private business, while farmers and ranchers and the rest of rural Saskatchewan was ignored.

Compare that to our record, Mr. Speaker. In just two years look what we've accomplished: decreased premiums and increased coverage for crop insurance, increased compensation for producers through the wildlife damage compensation program from 80 per cent to 100 per cent, improved agricultural extension services, new incentives to help Crown land lessees purchase their land, the largest education property tax reduction in this province's history, and the largest agricultural budget in the province's history. That's our record on agriculture and to me that sounds like progress.

The final thing that I want to speak about today, Mr. Speaker, is the Year of the Métis and Trails of 1885. The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan has requested 2010 by designating as the Year of the Métis in Saskatchewan. Our government recognizes the unique history and culture of the Métis people. And we will honour the request by recognizing 2010 as the Year of the Métis in Saskatchewan, and by working with the Métis Nation and other organizations to honour the Trails of 1885 celebration. This will be a really special occasion for the Métis people and the province of Saskatchewan. I think Robert Doucette, the president of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, has summed the importance of this event up well. He said:

We are expecting thousands of Métis citizens from across the country to join us as we turn a new historic chapter in the lives of Métis Citizens, Canadians, and Citizens of the great province of Saskatchewan. Reconciliation is important to this chapter in history . . . The designation of 2010 being The Year of the Métis, by the Province of Saskatchewan in . . . [this year's] throne speech marks a great chapter in moving forward for the Métis Nation as well as The Province [of Saskatchewan].

The trails of 1885 will commemorate the Northwest Resistance of 1885. The resistance is one of the key points in the history of the Métis people and the province of Saskatchewan. It is central to our collective identity. That's why it is so important that we continue to tell the story of 1885. I'm sure that many of the members here today already know the story about 1885, but these stories continue to warrant being told nonetheless. The members of the Assembly will oblige me if I digress into a bit of a history lesson.

After the Red River uprising of 1870, many Métis migrated from Manitoba to new communities along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. Not long after that, the Métis found that they were again facing the same problems they had in the old Red River settlement.

[15:45]

Among other things, they feared the loss of their land as new surveyors from out east imposed Canadian township systems on lot divisions into the Métis' long, narrow river lots. What this meant was that many Métis would lose their access to the river. In June 1884, a delegation of Métis led by Gabriel Dumont travelled to Montana to persuade the Manitoba resistance leader, Louis Riel, to return to the Saskatchewan district to help them present their grievances to the Canadian government.

Throughout the summer of 1884, unrest grew. And on March 18th, 1885, it culminated in Riel's creation of the provisional government of Saskatchewan centred in the community of Batoche. On March 26, 1885, in a field near the community of Duck Lake, the first shots of the resistance were fired.

Under the command of Inspector Leif Crozier, a force of about 100 Northwest Mounted Police, and other volunteers from the Prince Albert area clashed with Métis forces led by Gabriel Dumont. When the smoke cleared, 17 people were dead — 12 policemen and volunteers, and five Métis, including Isidore Dumont, Gabriel's brother.

The Métis and the district of Saskatchewan were now in open conflict. A column of mounted police was hastily dispatched northward from Regina to garrison the town of Prince Albert. As the first shots of the uprising were being fired, General Middleton of the Canadian militia was on his way west to take command of the North-West Field Forces, which had responsibility for all military activities in Manitoba and the North-West Territories.

On April 6th, Middleton and a small force of Westerners, now augmented by more infantry, artillery, and cavalry from Winnipeg and by Boulton's Scouts from Russell, Manitoba set out from the small town of Fort Qu'Appelle on a 200-mile journey northwest to Batoche.

On April 24th, his troops experienced their first taste of battle at Fish Creek. The Canadian militia suffered a severe setback at the hands of Gabriel Dumont's sharpshooters. After Fish Creek, an even more cautious General Middleton continued his advance to the Métis headquarters of Batoche. There he began a four-day siege.

On May 12, 1885, the badly outnumbered Métis were finally overcome by Middleton's troop after a short, sharp battle. A few days later, Louis Riel surrendered and Gabriel Dumont escaped to Montana.

Louis was brought back to Regina where he was tried for treason before Judge Hugh Richardson. He was found guilty August 1, 1885. On November 16th, Riel was hanged at the mounted police barracks in Regina. His body was then taken to Winnipeg for burial.

This year, 125 years later, we will move forward by remembering Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel, and their contemporaries and by recognizing 2010 as the Year of the Métis in Regina and participating in the Trails of 1885 celebration.

Established in 2008, the Trails of 1885 is a government-led initiative that pulls together a variety of sites, festival, and events that are linked together by the events of 1885. Spread across three provinces, starting in Manitoba, passing through all of Saskatchewan, and ending in Alberta, the stories of 1885 will be told to visitors from all over Western Canada, in fact the world.

For three weeks next summer, Trails of 1885 events and celebrations will occur throughout the province of Saskatchewan. There are two events I would like to make special mention of.

One event that I am personally looking forward to is Back to Batoche Days. The celebration began in 1970 and it showcased Métis history and culture every year since. It has changed in some ways over the years, but in others, it has stayed the same. When it began in 1970, everyone slept in army tents. Today you'll see tents and campers and even the occasional teepee. There are numbers of different events to take in and enjoy while attending the festival, ranging from fiddle music and dancing and jigging to hatchet throwing and log carrying. I'm also rather partial to the open pit bannock baking contest.

Back to Batoche Days are held every year in July, and all people are encouraged to come out and experience the Métis culture as it was and as it is today. This year, more than 10,000 people attended Back to Batoche Days. Next year, to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the North-West Resistance, the festival has been extended to last a whole week. It will run July 18th to 25th. I hope many of the members will be able to attend.

In the town of Duck Lake there will programs running all summer long. An artist will paint murals to celebrate the occasion. When I think of this I am reminded of something Louis Riel said just prior to his passing. He said the Métis Nation will go to sleep for 100 years and will rise again led by their artists. When I enjoy the music of Métis artists like Donny Parenteau and Louis Simard, I am inclined to think that he may have been correct in his prediction, though perhaps off on the date by 25 years.

I eagerly await seeing the Métis Nation rise again in the work of its artists. The Duck Lake Interpretive Centre will also commemorate the battle of Duck Lake in June, while celebrating its own 50th anniversary.

I am pleased to say that our government is contributing \$375,000 toward repairs of Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre, which marks the location where the first shots were fired in the North-West Resistance. The centre houses more than 6,000 artifacts, many of which date back to 1885 and tell the story of the resistance from three different perspectives: the First Nations, the Métis, and the pioneers.

On a personal level, I deeply appreciate this last fact, the fact that approaches the event from all three perspectives. To truly appreciate the event of 1885, it's best that we look at them from each other's perspectives. There is much to be gained when we transcend our inclination to attach blessing and blame, to say that one side was right, the other side was wrong, and instead to review the resistance of 1885 as a clash of cultures — neither

side better nor worse, and both deeply ingrained into our province's identity.

In light of this, we're excited to contribute to the preservation of Duck Lake Regional Interpretive Centre so that Saskatchewan people, and all Canadians for that matter, can learn about and celebrate our rich past, and so that we can share our fascinating stories with visitors to our province. To know where you're going, you have to know where you've been, and by remembering the stories of 1885 we are preparing ourselves as a province to move forward into a brighter future.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the time. And I will be supporting . . . and not supporting the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview. No — Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — I have to wear a tag. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm very happy today to rise and respond to the Throne Speech. Before I do that, I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome my colleagues from Regina Douglas Park and from Saskatoon Riversdale, welcome them to the legislature and congratulate them both on their wonderful victories. I'm looking forward to working with both of them. I think we're all going to be better for their input and their participation.

Before I also get too far into my remarks, I want to thank my family who continue to support me through all of the political things that go on and continue to watch and be there when I need them. My mother is still a fierce campaigner. Even though she's almost 84 years old, she still goes on the campaign trail. I want to thank my husband in particular who puts up with being alone a lot and still is very supportive of the things that I do.

And I particularly want to thank the people in Eastview, my executive for sure, who continue to work very hard for me and for the constituents of Eastview. I want to thank my constituency assistant, April Anderson who keeps the office running and who works so well for the people of Saskatoon Eastview, and does such a good job that makes me look better. I also want to thank the people in Eastview who continue to support me and who continue to come with their issues, and are always, always there with good advice and support.

So the Throne Speech, it's interesting reading it or even listening to it, and the theme of moving forward, I really couldn't see where the theme actually fit into the text of the Throne Speech. It was more like even, if it wasn't moving backwards, it was certainly only moving sideways.

And I know my colleague from Moose Jaw Wakamow pointed out that there was at least 50 items that were mentioned as promises or things to do in this Throne Speech in '09 that were also mentioned in '08. So they're either didn't get done or they were just re-promised. So 50, that's quite a few. And I think she said that there was only probably 12 to 15 new ideas, which I'll talk about.

And I think it was interesting, the songs that were sung at the Throne Speech, particularly the "Man in the Mirror." And I'm thinking if the government would look at themselves in the mirror, who would they see standing with them? Would they

see the homeless women and children who were turned away from the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] in Saskatoon, the 3,400 of them? Would they see those people? Would they see the health care workers who have been almost a year or more without a contract?

Would they see seniors who are unable to afford their rents, their medication? Some of them who have come to me and said they have now taken to only taking their medication every second day because they can't afford to take it every day. Some of them who have come and said they're sitting in the dark. They don't turn on their lights. Some who have said they don't cook very much any more because they can't afford the utility. Some of them who are selling their grave plots.

I mean, the stories are pretty sad for people who simply can't afford to live in Saskatchewan and really don't see what happened to the boom. It certainly passed them by. And now that the boom has been blown by the fiscal mismanagement of the Sask Party government, they really don't have much opportunity to celebrate. Anything moving forward for them is really not contained in this speech.

We also have nothing — and quite appallingly — nothing that mentions people in the North. And I know my colleague from Cumberland stands up every day talking about long-term care in northern Saskatchewan. There are only 14 beds in La Ronge that cover that whole side of the North. That simply isn't enough for seniors living in the North to have comfortable accommodation when they need the care that long-term care provides.

We need to see more done for people in the North, not just in long-term care, but in all the things that they need up there — in particular, mental health services. So many things have been left slide in the last couple of years, no mention of them. And people are feeling quite marginalized and forgotten in the North.

I also want to talk about nothing for women. And I find that interesting that there was nothing for women in this Throne Speech. We don't even have a status of women secretariat. We have a male minister responsible for the Status of Women such as the department would be. And I know when . . .

An Hon. Member: — The only one in the country.

Ms. Junor: — It is the only one in the country. I know when I was at a Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians meeting that it was mentioned. I actually didn't know who was responsible for the Status of Women, and it was brought up that it was probably the minister of advanced . . . labour, education, immigration, whatever else he has in his title. They've lumped in the Status of Women also.

And I know one of the women MLAs from Quebec was appalled. She said that would simply not be done in Quebec. That would simply not be accepted, that there was not a woman in charge of the Status of Women. So women know this; there's been nothing mentioned about women or women's issues. It has just been deadly silent.

And when we looked at the health care workers who were here

the other day, most of them are women. Most of them are women. They came from long-term care facilities, from hospitals, from different places where women do the work of the health system. Many of them were women. Many of them brought their children. Many of them are older women.

And we saw that their issues are not being addressed. They don't feel respected. They don't feel valued. They certainly don't feel part of the health care team, which is something that we have talked about so long, that is so important in the health care system that if you want to deliver care differently and you want to put the patient first, you have to have a team approach so things are not siloed and the patient is shifted or shunted from one place to the other without any coordination, co-operation, or collaboration.

So we have seen nothing from this government that would deal with issues around the collective bargaining, which I think is pretty appalling. And I think it sends a very, very chilling message to working people, especially in the health system. But I mean all working people in Saskatchewan are watching this government, came into government saying, came in on the mantra that they were going to go to war with the working people. And this is something that has been said, outright said, war with the working people.

What does that say to all working people in Saskatchewan? Not everyone is unionized, but they do work. And the message was, we're going to war with working people. What a message to give to people in this province who you are supposedly representing. And you are trying to sell this province to other provinces and other areas of the world to be the best place to come and live and work and raise a family — but not if you're a worker. How does that work out?

[16:00]

And I think it was interesting that the women that were out in front of the legislature were first of all denied access to their legislature to come in and listen to questions about their issues. This is a democracy. Nobody should be turned away. And I think, to the credit of the Speaker, they were allowed in and they did have a good day watching their issues being brought forward.

The 3,400 women and children who were turned away from the YWCA in Saskatoon this past year, there's still a huge issue of how women and children are supported. When you talk about children living in poverty, they live in families — most of the time in single-parent families, and most of those single parents are women. And we're doing nothing for them.

We still have a huge way to go in affordable housing. And many of the affordable housing projects that have been announced are things that we did when we were in government. And the plan is being carried on, and hopefully we need to add many, many more so many people will have adequate housing and that's affordable.

And that isn't just single women with families. That's single women. That is seniors. Seniors cannot afford their rent. We are getting many, many stories about seniors who cannot afford their rent. They are moving out into less desirable

accommodations.

Like I said at the beginning of my speech, they are cutting down their medications. That is dangerous. When you take your medications every second day — they're prescribed daily — that is dangerous. When you're deciding whether you can afford to turn your lights on or you can afford to turn your stove on or you can afford to take your meds . . . You can't afford to get your glasses. You can't afford to get teeth. You're selling your grave plot.

What are we doing to our seniors? What are we doing to our seniors? It is shameful. It is not something that I think Saskatchewan should be proud of, and I don't see a mention of those issues for seniors.

When we talk about long-term care for seniors, that is an issue. We do need to have more long-term care facilities, but that isn't the single most important issue for most seniors. They want to talk about affordability. They want to talk about dignity, respect, financial security, safety. They want to talk about a lot of issues. Long-term care is only one part of an issue that would face a senior in this province.

I also want to talk about rural doctors. There was things in the Throne Speech in particular about health. Rural doctors, a strategy for retaining or recruiting doctors was promised. We haven't seen anything. We've heard many, many communities in the paper, in the news, talking about how difficult it is to get doctors into their communities. That still is something that even increasing as we were doing, as we were in government, increasing seats in the medical school, we still have not fixed how you service rural Saskatchewan.

And for members who propose that they are the ones who represent rural Saskatchewan and think the most highly and were focusing on rural Saskatchewan issues, they haven't got any answer. And they haven't done anything about it. And when we talk about moving forward, I think most of the moving forward is sort of like bobbing and weaving. There doesn't seem to be a lot of actual direction.

And I also want to talk about the focus on health care, and the last year that we've had . . . Well Tony Dagnone did his report. The minister had a year of hiding behind Tony Dagnone. Every letter I saw that was copied to me with an issue from a person who had a significant or serious health issue and wrote to the minister, their response was, thank you for your letter, you know, I'm very concerned about your problem, but we've got a patient-first review in place. And basically that was the end of that.

So most people assumed that their issue would be dealt with in the patient-first review. Not so. In fact I asked Tony Dagnone if he actually got any of the letters that those answers were sent in. Did he as the commissioner see any of those letters of people's problems? Not one got to him. So for a whole year, people got fobbed off with . . . there's a patient-first review going on, so you just wait and things will be fixed for you.

The commissioner never got a letter, and he never saw any of that. And when we talk about his report . . . I felt sorry for him the day he released it actually because I don't think what we

saw that day was what he submitted. I think he put his heart and soul into doing a patient-first review, but I don't the recommendations that we saw — which were so vague and so underwhelming — would be what he would like to have seen with his name on it.

I think that the department and the minister and the government, the government and the minister basically directed the department to write what they wanted, and Tony Dagnone was left to have to put a good face on it and put out those 16 recommendations that were really so vague that I think the government can probably do nothing. And I think that's basically what they were probably wanting to do. And I think that I'm really sorry to see that Tony Dagnone was used that way.

I do think that a lot of the things I see in the Throne Speech — big, huge promises like the needle exchange program — I can't imagine why you would commission a report and then totally disregard the recommendations that were in it. Laurence Thompson's report that the government commissioned to look at the needle exchange program said that there was scientific consensus that this was the right thing to do, was to have this needle exchange program as it is. There was no need based on any evidence to actually change the program, to talk about capping, to talk about limiting the number of needles. There was no evidence. There is no consensus. Their own commissioned report says not. The government simply is acting on ideology.

There is more of a punitive nature to this than anything else. The community that deals with drug addicts and people who use drugs, they have said that they are appalled at this. This will not help them. It will not help people who are addicted. This will not help our HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome] rates. This will not help our hep C rates. This will be harmful and we will pay for this. People who are drug users will also pay because they will die if they're infected. They will die. But the taxpayers will pay because it will cost us more as these people can contract these diseases and die. It'll cost us more. But we're willing to do that because there's an ideology that we should be paternalistic and we should be punitive for people who have problems with drugs. I really think that's an unfortunate thing to be saying.

And I simply cannot sit down without talking about H1N1. I am actually quite . . . I think I'm disappointed, and that's probably the strongest word I'll use here. But the actual leadership on the H1N1 file is extremely disappointing. There are people calling daily in droves with questions that simply are not answered. And when I asked them, on behalf of the people that call me, and ask them, I get insulted in this legislature. I get ridiculed. And the minister tries to be flippant. And somehow — I'm not sure where he's trying to hide, but he sure is dancing — I can't see any answer. I asked logical, legitimate questions, and there's no answer.

Frankly he doesn't have any answers because I don't think he knows the file. I don't think he knows about it. I don't think he's paying attention. And I simply don't think people are confident in his leadership on this file.

The calls I get, people are confused. They're coming into my office. Seniors, young moms, people with children who are in high-risk groups, people who themselves are high risk — they do not have the confidence in the information that they are getting. And they're watching. They're watching. And these aren't . . . the people are watching and paying attention because they want to make good decisions. But the information is so contradictory and confusing that it's impossible from one day to the next to decide whether you should or shouldn't or your family should or shouldn't have the vaccine.

I think the leadership is actually, it actually is stunningly, stunningly lacking. So I really think that this is something that we'll continue to ask questions on because people are continuing to phone and say, what about, what about, what about.

So the job of the opposition is to be the watchdog. It's to be critical of things that are wrong, certainly, but it is also our job to put forward solutions. And in September, I had a press conference and said here are the things that I think would be logical to do. And some of the things the government took it to heart and actually started doing, but not all of them.

I know one of the things I talked about was streaming people away from emergency rooms because that will overwhelm them if everybody with flu symptoms appears in emergency. That just won't work. So I suggested that we talk about some off-site or triaging away from the main emergency area to deal with flu symptoms. Now I see one of the southern health districts is actually doing that.

So these are things that, instead of accusing me of fearmongering, I was actually trying to be helpful. And some of the things somebody actually paid attention to. The minister didn't get it, but those things, those things that I suggested were concrete, real solutions. I'm a registered nurse. And I'm not watching this with just a political hat. I'm watching this because I'm a nurse. I'm a mother. I'm a grandmother. And I myself need a vaccine myself. And so my family, I'm concerned about them.

Politics is way down here in what I think about H1N1. But the politician in the Minister of Health seems to have overridden the actual thinking person who would actually deal with this in a constructive way to deal with the people in the province. We're talking real people who have grandchildren, who have children, who are asking, what should I do? And nobody has an answer. Where should I go next week or is it next week?

I have a father who phoned and said, my son is in the identified high risk group. I live in Yorkton. I took my son, they said no, he can't be done this week, but if you drive him to Regina, he will be done. What kind of answer is that and what kind of service is that from the health system? There has to be some consistency. There has to be some consistency of messaging. There has to be some consistency of delivery because if you live in one health district, you're going to be disadvantaged over if you live in another. I don't think that's the Saskatchewan way.

And I think the minister, he was curious why he didn't have any questions. Well for the first year he hid behind me and my skirts

about what I didn't do or what our government didn't do. The first year that's all he did. Any question he got asked, it was oh well you didn't.

And last year was all behind Tony Dagnone. Well now there's nowhere to hide. And he's not doing very well out on his own, out in the open. He's not doing very well. And I do not have to be the judge of that; the public is judging that. I think it's fairly noticeable that it isn't working, trying to hide behind somebody else or something else. It isn't working for him.

And I also would like to talk about the financial meltdown that this government has had. It is affecting everything that happens. We have all this talk about potash and where it should be. The government was told immediately . . . I remember my colleague standing up and saying, this will not work; this is not possible, not feasible. But they plowed ahead anyway. And now they get to say, oops we made a mistake, my bad. And now put in some fiscal changes so that they won't do it again.

But they're government. If they do it again — what? — will they punish themselves by slapping themselves with a wet dollar bill? I mean there doesn't seem to be any accountability which was something that was a theme of the '08 — I think it was the '08 Throne Speech — accountability transparency. Don't have it, we don't have it.

There are no answers. People dance around. They put out reviews. They commission reports that they do nothing with. Frankly we don't see them. And today the minister was asked about another report, the out-of-province funding. He didn't have an answer. He had three different answers about what report it could be, so we maybe have three reports. I'm not sure. I don't think he's actually sure.

But the ability or the possibility of hiding behind a report on every issue doesn't actually fix anything. And for a government who thought they should fix everything . . . When they were in opposition, they did nothing but promise everything to everybody and bragged that they could deliver. Then they get into government and get a huge, huge treasury of money and acted giddy that they were going to be able to give everything to everybody that they promised.

The Minister of Finance . . . someone came into my office and told me he was going around saying, we have gobs of money, gobs of money. Like, that's the Minister of Finance. I mean, that's a bit odd. So people in the province thought things were pretty good. And when you start giving people everything, of course they think things are good. Now things are not good and the chickens have come to roost.

We have to look at what we've got here and it is not good. It is a financial meltdown. There are people who are having money taken away from their programs, money that's been given to them already. And I'm not talking about the children's hospital, the academic health sciences, St. Mary School, Station 20. I'm talking about small programs that are flying under the radar, that people are saying, I had the money; now it's been taken away.

And it's interesting that those four projects that I mentioned, which are fairly large projects, are all happening in Saskatoon:

Station 20 in Saskatoon, St. Mary School in Saskatoon, academic health sciences in Saskatoon, and children's hospital in Saskatoon. Nothing from the Sask Party MLAs when those things are cut. I don't see any commitment to the people in Saskatoon. Nothing. They don't even speak. They don't even speak up.

One of the members over there, the children's hospital is apparently his, not that it mattered that it was announced in the '80s and followed up with money from us in the '90s, and in 2007 and '05 and all the dates that we had to show the progress of this concept. It didn't matter. He was taking ownership of it. Has he said anything now when the money's been taken away? No. Haven't heard a word in Saskatoon, haven't heard a word about St. Mary School except from, naturally, the people that are going to be serviced by it who are very, very disappointed. Somehow or other the enhancements to St. Mary School were supposed to make up for the loss of Station 20 programs. Now you're taking away the programs from St. Mary's too.

[16:15]

So the people in Saskatoon and that area, inner-city area that have huge, huge health disparities, they get nothing. They get nothing. They're another group of people standing in the mirror looking at the Sask Party going, what about me? I didn't get anything from the boom.

So it doesn't matter if you think things were wonderful in the last two years. It didn't happen to those people that are standing in the mirror of the Sask Party. They didn't get it. They didn't get the boom. They didn't get the benefit and they still don't get anything. And when the members opposite go on and on after two years in government, when they talk about what we did for 16 years, people are tired of that. That is over. They can no longer stand behind that lame answer and lame heckle, frankly. People aren't interested in that anymore. They're interested in what you did for two years. What did you do for the last two years? And frankly, not much.

The Throne Speech looks back and talks about things that were done. No vision to move forward. If you're riding a bike you're probably out of gas, which is definitely what it looks like, and you better ride fast because there's snapping alligators coming at you, and those snapping alligators are at your heels because you can't manage the finances. And the people of Saskatchewan are the ones that will suffer because you are inadequate. The government has not got the financial knowledge or experience to lead in this province. And they've shown it. They've shown it. We've got the deficit. That is the report card on this government's ability to manage the finances of this province.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not be supporting the Throne Speech. And I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

Ms. Schriemer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today very interested in entering this Throne Speech debate. I would first, of course, like to welcome the member from Riversdale. This will be her first session after she was elected, and I thought I

would do two welcomes, but do beauty before age. And so of course, welcome to the member from Regina Douglas Park.

My father was very politically active, and I remember listening to some political discussions in my home where I grew up, and I remember his name coming up now and then. So I'm trying to remember, I think it was . . . well in 1982 I had my first-born, so it was before — I'm dating myself, but I suppose I'm also dating him — been a while.

I would like to talk about my constituency a bit, and first of all I would like to thank my CAs, Danielle Velazquez and Judy Peddle. Danielle is my full-time CA; Judy helps out. And Danielle, if it wasn't for her, I really would probably lose my mind. I'd also like to thank my soulmate, Gary, and of course the constituents whom I represent.

This year Sutherland celebrated their 100th birthday. So I was very fortunate to go to this event which was held outside on a beautiful day, and I'd just like to share some history about Sutherland. The village of Sutherland was incorporated on August 30, 1909. And when it became a town, it was 1912 when they reached the population of 1,000.

Sutherland was named after William Charles Sutherland, an MLA and the second Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He was elected to the first Legislative Assembly in the newly formed province of Saskatchewan on December 13, 1905. His grandson came to the celebrations — his name is Ian Sutherland — and brought greetings as well.

Sutherland of course is a railway town and grew because of its attachment to the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] railway. There was a streetcar that ran from 8th Street in Saskatoon to now what's known as 108th Street in Sutherland. The Shore Hotel was then located at Central Avenue and 108th Street, also known as Stephenson's Corner. The residents of Sutherland rallied for streetcar shelters. They felt that the hotel was not a suitable location for women and children to wait, especially during the cold winter months.

An interesting fact also is that at that location in 2006, while excavating the parking lot, a 25- to 35-year old woman was found stuffed in a barrel and well, I guess you don't jump into a barrel and throw yourself down a well, so it's obviously a murder and the clothing analysis dates the murder to have taken place between 1910 and 1920. What's also very interesting is I think it was for the first time in the history of the Saskatoon Police Service that they used Dr. Ernie Walker to do some forensic anthropology work and actually take the skull and make a face out of it which was shown on a cable TV network as one of the forensic criminal forensic shows.

As you all know, Sutherland residents often refer to themselves as being from Sutherland. The small town feel still exists. The character of the town of Sutherland continues as does the sense of identification.

Another event that took place in Sutherland this year is the 50th anniversary of the Ukrainian Parish of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. It was very interesting at the 100th celebration and at the 50th Ukrainian celebration, there was a lady, her name is Mrs. Husky, she was born and raised in

Sutherland and she still lives there today by herself, takes care of herself, and she's 98 years old. So that's quite a life. She would have seen some changes.

At the Ukrainian celebration for this church, I spoke and brought greetings from the province of Saskatchewan. I made mention of the Holodomor legislation. And what's very, very interesting was the pain in people's eyes and in their posture because these are all Ukrainian descendants or have come from the Ukraine themselves and that travesty is still very apparent in the Ukrainian community.

In the Throne Speech, health care was definitely highlighted. And in Saskatoon Sutherland constituency, I have the Royal University Hospital, university campus, Cancer Clinic, and several large, long-term care nursing homes. I recognize that there are issues in health care. And those issues involve surgical wait-lists, long-term care bed shortage, addiction services fractured and non-functional, staffing issues. Our Minister of Health has been handed some big problems.

And the opposition may say that it's been two years and these are our problems. However, this is not true. These problems did not start in the last two years, Mr. Speaker. And I would like to identify an argument that the opposition used on our Finance minister regarding potash. They say, how could you not predict the potash price? All the indicators were there. It was an uncertain predictability. And the prediction was lowballed as much as necessary, given the information at the time. The opposition says no, we should have known, the Finance minister should have known.

Well, Mr. Speaker, 16 years ago, a certain percentage of Saskatchewan's population was such that in the year 2000-plus we would need more long-term care beds; we would need bigger hospitals. So let's turn that around and use their argument against them. They had certain predictability. They knew the exact age of people. They knew the exact population, so they could easily have predicted the health care needs down the road.

With potash there was no predictability. You can't predict behaviour. You can't predict a volatile market. So, you know, the unfairness, the whole logical argument just is silly. But given the way they think sometimes, I'm guessing that maybe the NDP thought that the entire population of Saskatchewan would move with the member from Douglas Park over to Calgary, Mr. Speaker. Then we wouldn't need any long-term beds.

I would like to say — and this is a fact — that our Health minister, our health care plan is the right way to go and it is moving forward. Patient First Review was done, and for the first time patients were made as the centre of the investigation. Our patients deserve the best care, Mr. Speaker, and that's what our government and our Health minister intends to do. And we will support a publicly funded, publicly administered health care system with no queue jumping.

I'd like to quote a man that I admire very much, General Colin Powell, and what he says in lesson 3 of his leadership presentation:

Don't be buffaloes by experts and elites. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Elites can become so inbred that they produce haemophiliacs who bleed to death as soon as they are nicked by the real world.

We are looking at a holistic approach to addictions. For 16 years it's been neglected. In the opposition's tenure it was fractured so that treatment is under one department, HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] strategy is under a different department, and addiction services is under a different department. All of those things have to work together, Mr. Speaker. They all need to be addressed.

And I'll explain why because the opposition really doesn't get it. We cannot just treat the HIV issue because we will save people from HIV, but they'll die of their addiction. We need to do both, and that is our intention. And that is a solid, correct, right way to go.

I think the opposition would rather that people overdose and die. That way, they didn't die of HIV, but they overdosed and died of their addiction. Is that acceptable to the Health critic? Is that what she wants? No HIV deaths — we'll only have overdoses, and they don't count. Well that's just not acceptable.

So we're going to have a drugs 101 class, and maybe the opposition will understand.

Drugs come, as far as being used on the street, in two areas. One is a stimulant, one is a depressant. The drugs that can be injected into the veins of a person's body have to be water-soluble. The drugs of choice in Saskatchewan are cocaine, which is a stimulant; methylphenidate, which is a pharmaceutical and a stimulant; and the opioids, morphine, hydromorphone.

[16:30]

So what we know is that people get addicted and they use these chemicals and they inject them. And how they inject them . . . Let's talk about cocaine, cocaine hydrochloride. It's a powder, it's water-soluble, it's what you inject. So they take cocaine, they dissolve it in water, they draw it up into a syringe, and they inject into their vein. What they also do is they draw up more water after the injection. It's called a wash. And so they get more chemical into their veins.

Sometimes, when people are really stoned and sitting around using cocaine, I will let my friend use the syringe I just used so that person, my friend, can do the wash. So what that means is my blood was in the barrel of that syringe, and I'm giving it to my friend so he can get the residual cocaine and inject it in himself.

The only way to treat that is by education. The only way to educate people is to spend time with them and talk to them. And that's what's lacking in this program, and that's what we're going to fix.

So let's talk about crack cocaine. Crack cocaine is cocaine base. It's not water soluble. How you make crack cocaine which is smoked — it can't be injected — is to dissolve cocaine hydrochloride in water, heat it, and add baking soda. The

cocaine molecules bind to the base, it turns into a rock, and you smoke it. When you smoke it, Mr. Speaker, it has to be held in a steel wool because it's like mercury. Crack will run away from the flame. And it's more pure than cocaine hydrochloride on the street but it doesn't last as long. You're smoking more often, and people become more violent.

So there is a hypothesis that maybe we should encourage people, encourage addicts, rather than injecting cocaine to smoke cocaine and then we won't have to worry as much about HIV. They've tried it in other provinces. They were providing addicts with what's called a crack kit, a pipe to smoke it with and butane lighters — you need a big flame — and what's happened is their violent crimes have increased, and their violent crimes have increased as a direct result of more crack addicts doing more crime to get more drug. That's not a solution, Mr. Speaker.

The other things that . . . Well let's talk about methylphenidate. Methylphenidate is a stimulant. It's a pharmaceutical and it's otherwise known as Ritalin and that is used to treat ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]. And people say well, oh, you're drugging kids. And no, you're not drugging kids. How it works is ADHD is a disorder where the frontal lobe of the brain is slow so it doesn't pick up the stimuli as the child is looking in their surroundings — a noisy classroom. In here where you got all this stuff going on and you can't pay attention. So some become hyper; some don't, but it's attention deficit disorder. What the Ritalin does, which is an oral medication — or methylphenidate which is the chemical name — is it speeds up the frontal lobe of the brain so that the child can then sort out the stimuli and keep up with what's going on. So it doesn't make the child stoned and relax. What it does is allow the child to react to the stimuli that he chooses to because the frontal lobe of their brain is finally working.

Now that drug is highly used on the street. It's crushed; it's dissolved and injected. It acts like cocaine when you inject it because it's a stimulant, and so a lot of people were getting Ritalin prescriptions falsely. And unfortunately some physicians wrote, liberally, prescriptions for Ritalin. And what would happen is the drug dealers would have, you know, a certain amount of people who would sell their scrips to them every month because it's prescribed by the month.

So what our government did, what this Health minister did, was within six months of us taking office, he added Concerta to the formulary. And Concerta is methylphenidate in a pill form that cannot be crushed, dissolved, and injected. So in other words, what we did is we lessened access to a pharmaceutical which is abused on the street.

These are the kind of real solutions that will positively affect people. We're not leaving anybody behind. We're not hurting any HIV strategy. We are putting some common sense into this place. I will be supporting our Throne Speech and proudly so, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways, the member from Rosetown-Elrose.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be joining in this debate, Mr.

Speaker. I have some people that I also, as several of the members have done previously, would like to acknowledge. Several of the members have said it more eloquently than I can, the toll being in politics takes on your family. And I want to acknowledge my family: my wife Bonnie, my mother Elizabeth Reiter in Unity, my sister Laura and her husband Eldon Schwab in Wilkie, and my brother Ken and his wife Debbie and my nephews Jeremy and Justin in Lloydminster. They're great kids. By some quirk of fate, somehow they do have one flaw. They've become Edmonton Eskimo fans, Mr. Speaker. But I'm working on that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, before I get into talking about the Throne Speech. I should just apologize and tell the story of what happened to me this morning. I know I don't look particularly at my best, a little bit dishevelled. When I got . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Mr. Speaker, I have the most agreeable colleagues. They're just fantastic that way.

Mr. Speaker, true story, when I woke up this morning . . . I'm staying at a hotel downtown, at the Ramada, a beautiful hotel. It's great. The staff are excellent. My room's very nice. The towels are so thick and fluffy I can hardly get my suitcase closed.

Mr. Speaker, I was in the shower this morning and . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are yelling, more, more, but I have to keep this within the realms of good taste. I was in the shower this morning and the power went out. The power went out. Everything went pitch black. Now years ago I was in a photography club and there was this test they did in a darkroom where if you couldn't see your hand in front of your eyes . . . It really was like that. It was that dark in the hotel. So trying to get dressed in the dark, Mr. Speaker, trying to put cufflinks in in the dark, and trying to tie your tie by the light of your BlackBerry . . . So, Mr. Speaker, I didn't shave very well by the light of my BlackBerry, so that's why I look as bad as I do today. For those people out there in TV land, typically I look a lot more like Brad Pitt than I do this morning.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge my constituency assistant Kathie Parry at home in Rosetown. I don't know whether she's watching right now or not, but does a lot of good work for me there, works hard on behalf of our constituency. The staff in the office here, the Minister of Highways office, Doug Line, Scott Simpkins, Ashley Anderson, and Karalee Croissant also do wonderful work, are always there for me. I appreciate that very much. And of course I'd be remiss if I didn't mention actually the constituents of Rosetown-Elrose themselves who have given me this just incredible privilege, and I'm so honoured to serve in this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

Also as many of our members have done, I would also like to welcome the new members to this Assembly, the member from Saskatoon Riversdale. Now I haven't had the opportunity to meet her yet or to have a chat, and I look forward to that happening. As a rookie myself I don't think it would be appropriate to offer a lot of advice. All I can come back to is what my grandmother told me years ago, is always be careful of the company you keep. But I see from her sitting on that side I'm already too late with that advice, Mr. Speaker.

And I'd also like to of course welcome the member from Regina Douglas Park who has been in the Assembly for many years previous to this.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of what this government has done in the short few months that we've been in government. I believe from talking to my constituents and to people around this province that this government is tremendously popular. People appreciate the hard work that my colleagues have been doing. In particular I have to mention my boss, the Premier, who does just an incredible job for us and who is so popular himself personally and deservedly so. In fact, I have to tell you a story about that, Mr. Speaker. This is a true story actually. Last winter . . . This one's serious. Pipe down.

Mr. Speaker, last winter, last winter was a very difficult time for me and for my family. My father passed away after a brief period of illness and, as you can imagine, it was very difficult on all of us, particularly my mother. And at that time the Premier . . . When my dad had passed away, the Premier had phoned my cellphone and had left a message. I'd missed it. I didn't answer it. And it was an extremely nice message and personal, so I won't get into that. But my mother was feeling particularly down and I thought this would cheer her up, so I played the message for her and it did, and it was emotional for her.

Anyway when that was done, my mom who in our family . . . My dad was always the one that was more the practical joker than my mom, but she has a little bit of that in her too and she said, could you do me a favour? I said, anything, mom. She said, the next time you see the Premier could you tell him, please, tell him from me that he is my favourite politician ever. Yes. So instinctively I said, of course, mom. And then I got thinking. I said, mom, you understand that that was before and now I'm in politics. I'm a politician too, so I'll tell him that you said that he's your second favourite politician. And my mom kind of smiled and said, no, but if it makes you feel better you can tell him he's one of my top two.

Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud of how this government is moving forward and how it's responded to the challenges and the expectations of Saskatchewan people. The people of Saskatchewan told us that they wanted a health care system where people would have proper nursing care, and they wanted a government that was committed to meeting this need. They wanted a government that wasn't afraid to have ambitious goals and also the credibility to deliver on its promises.

When we set a target of 800 nurses, members across the aisle were skeptical, Mr. Speaker. They didn't believe we could reach this target. They were continuing to see Saskatchewan as a have-not province, doomed forever to live in and out of equalization, dependent on other provinces to set the economic agenda for our country.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan had more faith than the members opposite. They believe in this province as a place to work, live, and raise their families. The population of Saskatchewan has now risen at a rate not seen since the '50s. Today, over 16,000 new people call this province home. Among these people are some of the 560 registered nurses that are now providing health care in communities right across our

province.

I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, of how our government took action and provided property tax relief to taxpayers right across this province. The members across the aisle were skeptical again. For years the people of Saskatchewan were told that someday their government would respond to the calls for lower education tax. Well, Mr. Speaker, this government answered that call. In just two years our government provided the largest reduction in education portion of property taxes in this province's history.

In 2008 the total education property tax paid was \$752 million after the education property tax credit. In 2009 the total education property tax is estimated to be 649. Under the new system, Mr. Speaker, education mill rates will be cut and capped for the three major property classes of residential, commercial, and agriculture. While doing that, this government is increasing funding to school divisions by over \$240 million to ensure the best education for our students.

With this budget, our government is now funding 63 per cent of the operating costs of K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12], up from 51 per cent last year. It provides savings to the majority of property owners while also ensuring fairness across the province. Businesses can now invest with confidence in Saskatchewan knowing that mill rates are now capped, adding certainty to our investment climate.

Mr. Speaker, I was there for two consecutive SARM conventions back a few years ago when the then premier of the province, the former leader of the NDP government, spoke to the delegates at SARM. And what did he do for two consecutive years, Mr. Premier? He told the delegates that the status quo was not on. I was there, Mr. Speaker. My friend Dave Marit, the president of SARM was there. And what happened, Mr. Speaker? Nothing.

Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture minister very ably mentioned this earlier today in his address, and I just think it bears repeating, that the NDP made the promise. They didn't deliver. Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing will be very pleased to hear me say, they just didn't get around to it.

On debt reduction, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that when the funding was available, our government chose to invest in the future by paying down a significant portion of the province's debt. We've reduced the government's debt by \$2.7 billion or nearly 40 per cent. We had the largest income tax cut in the history of our province. Basic personal exemption and the spousal exemption were each increased. Mr. Speaker, there is now 80,000 low-income taxpayers that are off the tax rolls altogether. And the list can go on and on, Mr. Speaker.

But I also want to highlight for the members what's happening within the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. Before I get into that, all the good work that's going on, and I'd be remiss if I didn't mention my predecessor, the member from Cypress Hills, who laid the groundwork for so many of the good things that are happening, happening now.

I want to read something from, I believe it was yesterday or the day before, from *Hansard*, that the member from Regina

Northeast who's the Highways critic, and who's . . . Actually, you know, it's funny on the sort of the partisan politics that sometimes goes on in this building. You can't help but have feelings towards members opposite — sometimes strong, sometimes not so much. There's members there that I'm a little bit fond of, and there's a number that I'm not.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member from Regina Northeast is one that I can't help but feel, he actually — and I mean this sincerely — he's a very nice man. He is. He's less grumpy than most over there, and you know, Mr. Speaker, he actually is a very nice man. He's just maybe a bit misguided and he votes funny. But other than that, Mr. Speaker, I enjoy him very much.

Now speaking of the voting funny part and being a bit misguided, I was listening intently to his speech the other night, and I have to quote a couple of things from the speech. It started, Mr. Speaker, with the . . . He mentions, and I quote:

I had the opportunity to travel through Saskatchewan a fair amount with my colleague from Regina Walsh Acres as part of our MLA summer tour. We travelled through five or six, I think it was about six, constituencies in the province . . .

Now those five or six constituencies, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear they did that. And I'm assuming that, unlike when they were in government, I think it wasn't just the constituencies in Regina, if I understand that right. It would be out in rural Saskatchewan, which I think is great.

He went on to say, “. . . Mr. Speaker, it was a bit of an eye opener because I soon discovered that there are a lot of miles and roads in this province that are in need of much attention.” It gets better: “. . . Mr. Speaker, I know that there's a number of roads that are in a sad state of repair.” That's great. You see the pattern building here. I'm glad to see that they've noticed that.

I continue to quote, Mr. Speaker, and he says, “But what's scary, Mr. Speaker, is a number of these roads that are in a sad state of repair today have been for some time . . .”

And then my favourite quote, Mr. Speaker, is:

There's been a number of instances where they just couldn't conceive why their particular road had been left out. It had been left out for a while. It's not just something that happened in the last year or two, Mr. Speaker. It's been in need of repair for a number of years . . .

Now, Mr. Speaker, I couldn't help but get a kick out of that because, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if he checked or talked to his colleagues, but this government's only been in power for two years. Those roads that the members opposite are continually complaining about didn't just get in the horrible state of affairs that they are overnight. It didn't all happen in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, transportation is a priority of this government. We inherited a massive infrastructure deficit from the former government. This government has invested the largest amounts of infrastructure funding in history in the last two years. We've been busy, Mr. Speaker, in all areas of infrastructure

replacement. We've been replacing and upgrading bridges and culverts. The ministry has allocated over \$44 million to fund our bridges and culverts program in the past year. That includes \$10 million to begin work on the St. Louis bridge, that's part of the government's investment in new transportation infrastructure.

We have also upgraded our primary highways. In fact, this year we added an additional 5,000 kilometres of nine-month primary weight highways, expanding the length of the system by 50 per cent.

We have let the public know our plans, Mr. Speaker. On December 3, 2008, we released our five-year rolling plan. We've committed to this plan and to date have completed over 3,200 kilometres of road repair in our first two years of government.

Mr. Speaker, talking about the amount of road work that's been done around the province this past summer, I had the good fortune to travel all over the province. I spoke to a number of events, and in fact once in a while took time to have some fun. And I was at a golf tournament and was the guest speaker afterwards. And a couple of people, one of whom I knew, actually showed up late for the golf tournament. I razzed him a little bit about it, and they told me that the reason they were late, ironically, was because they got held up by road construction.

So, Mr. Speaker, after supper when I was speaking, I felt it was only appropriate, as Minister of Highways I felt the first thing I should do is I mentioned the two people and what had happened. And I apologized to them because, Mr. Speaker, I did feel like we were responsible for that. I told them I was sorry because I had no doubt that that never would have happened under an NDP government.

We've also moved forward on other policy initiatives such as a memorandum of understanding that I signed earlier this month with Alberta to harmonize policies and regulations for commercial vehicle operations between our two provinces. One of the important aspects of our relationship with Alberta is that economic activity that goes on in one province doesn't necessarily stop at the border. The people of Lloydminster and their outstanding, young MLA, for example, can tell you about the extent to which our economies are intertwined.

One of the things we share is a reliance on transportation. Here in Saskatchewan virtually all sectors of our economy rely on low-cost, safe, and efficient access to transportation systems and services. In fact about three-quarters of our provincial gross domestic product is derived from exports.

In our province, we've made record investments in our highway system — \$1.2 billion since we came to office, Mr. Speaker. We've also made new resources available to our urban and our rural municipal partners to help them address their own infrastructure needs. Everyone understands the importance of building and maintaining highways, but the regulatory and policy framework under which the transportation system operates is often overlooked. Regulation and policy have the potential to either encourage or hinder access to efficient and safe transportation services.

I was so pleased that Minister Luke Ouellette of Alberta and myself, as minister for this great province, entered into a memorandum of understanding that will reduce barriers to trade in commercial trucking operations between our two provinces. Through this memorandum of understanding, we will work to harmonize weights and permit conditions for a variety of vehicle configurations, including oversized vehicles.

For example, the turnpike double is a vehicle configuration that involves a power unit pulling two trailers. This configuration offers both cost savings and environmental benefits, as fewer trips are required to transport freight. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, turnpike doubles can operate with a permit, but permit conditions can vary between the two provinces. Harmonization of permit requirements will simplify this.

Another area that was addressed in the MOU [memorandum of understanding] is greater co-operation in the enforcement of commercial vehicle regulation. Greater co-operation between our two provinces and their compliance officers has the potential to enhance efficiency without impacting safety on our highway system. Examples of areas we'll be focusing on include developing a scheduling system for weigh scales near the border to ensure both provinces are not stopping the same vehicles.

We're going to work at developing additional joint inspection facilities, building on the success of the existing facility at Macklin. We're going to look at extending Alberta's partner in compliance program to Saskatchewan. Through this program, carriers with exemplary performance records can bypass scales through a pre-clearance system. We're also going to look at developing a protocol for joint investigations where cross-border co-operation would assist in identifying carriers whose non-compliance poses a safety risk.

So what does this mean for the people of Saskatchewan? It means goods will move more efficiently across the border, making them more affordable. And that will help both economies. I'd like to add that this MOU is a direct result of our respective premiers' stated intention to improve interprovincial co-operation and coordination.

When our government came to office, one of our stated goals was to make Saskatchewan a leader in the new West, to be an active participant in Western Canadian initiatives that expand economic opportunity, improve public services, and enhance security for Saskatchewan people. The MOU with Alberta is a concrete example of that. In fact the MOU is a direct outcome from the first joint Alberta-Saskatchewan cabinet meeting in the fall of 2008.

Mr. Speaker, so many exciting things are happening in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, I want the members opposite to know that things are going well in this province, and this Throne Speech will continue that. Our government will continue to move forward and deliver to the people of this province. We will move forward with such things as our Patient First Review recommendations, where we'll make sure health care in Saskatchewan functions in a cohesive system. Over the next four years, our government will reduce surgical wait times in Saskatchewan to no longer than three months. For 16 years there was no plan to address health care issues such as

long-term care centres for our seniors

Mr. Speaker, we're focusing on many areas — areas such as energy where we'll be looking at all energy options to develop an advanced and reliable power system that can accommodate future growth in this province, Mr. Speaker. There will be a significant commitment to increased wind power. Areas like the environment where we will move forward with plans for a new environmental regulatory framework.

Areas like education, Mr. Speaker. This government takes education very seriously. We're ensuring that there are the schools and resources out there for our students to learn. That's why we're upgrading and building our infrastructure. We've invested nearly \$300 million in a two-year period.

Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward to exceed our goals. Early learning and child care spaces by the end of March 2010 will total 11,400. Mr. Speaker, we'll move forward on our continued commitment of additional police officers.

And let's not forget about agriculture, Mr. Speaker. Under the great guidance of our minister, we're moving the AgriStability program back to this province, Mr. Speaker. Families will benefit from the farm and ranch water infrastructure program. It'll provide \$53 million over four years for wells, dugouts, and pipelines. We've improved the crop insurance program. Mr. Speaker, there's so many great things happening in agriculture and all across this great province. I'm so proud to be here.

I just want to close by again saying how proud I am to be a part of this government and how we are finally and actually moving this province forward. Mr. Speaker, again I'm so proud to be the MLA for the Rosetown-Elrose constituency. I thank the good people there for the privilege of serving in this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be voting for the amendment, and I will very, very proudly be supporting the original motion supporting this Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — Being the hour of adjournment, this Assembly will stand adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

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