



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

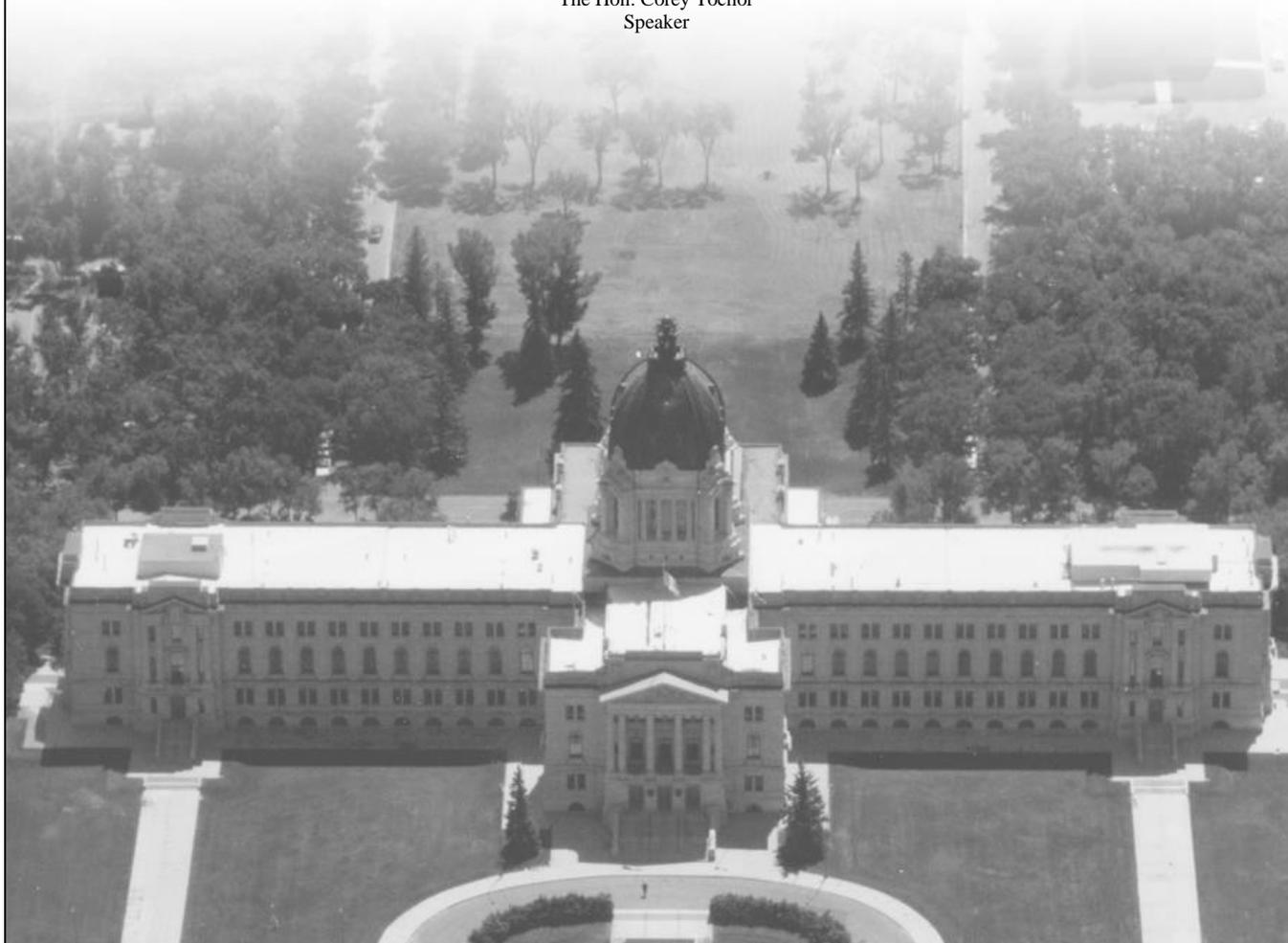
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Corey Tochor
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN
1st Session — 28th Legislature

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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Speaker: — It now being 7 p.m., we'll resume special debate. I recognize the member from Arm River.

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

**MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Doherty that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Ms. Sproule.]

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to continue on with my budget debate. You know this budget is about keeping Saskatchewan strong. And, you know, we're going to face some challenges. And I was on treasury board and we faced many challenges then. I'll say though when I was on treasury board, we ran balanced budgets.

But as we move forward with this there were some tough decisions that were made and I can understand that, you know, because I was there when some tough ones had to be made. Urban parks would have been a tough one; they would have had to struggle with that, you know. But I would remind the members opposite they're talking about lots. The regional parks, they're the same as urban parks. They're not funded. They've never been funded by the government. The only thing that they funded there is capital projects. Other than that it's volunteers that make it work, fundraisers that get them regional parks up and running. So, you know, tough decisions — urban park or 10 new cancer drugs. I'll tell you what, when you go to Arm River, I know what they'll pick. They'll pick the 10 new cancer drugs. That's what they'll pick.

You know as we move forward in keeping Saskatchewan strong, you know, and we got some challenges facing us. You know one of them is a weak-kneed Prime Minister in Ottawa. You know, he worries me. I can remember . . . He's going to be a worse Prime Minister than his old man was because I can remember when his dad gave my dad the finger and gave other grain farmers the finger. When they went . . . and all they asked was to sell their grain, you know. And you know what he told them? He says, that's not my job. And I'm scared that this kid is going to be the same when it comes to treating the West. He's going to treat the same, the West . . . It's not that he's going to be mean. It's just he didn't care and Pierre didn't care. You know, he was more interested in down East.

And those are some of the challenges we're going to have. We're going to have to have some fights with Ottawa. One of them is grain transportation. You know it's . . . We had some challenges years ago, you know, and the grain companies have stepped up a bit. But I'll tell you what, under this government, the Liberal government, I'm scared they're going to start

reverting back to where, you know, prairie farmers are maybe just a little bit not a priority for them. We're going to need to be working with Ottawa to make sure that that doesn't happen.

You know, I had a . . . I've had another elevator close in my constituency. I mean it happens. They're old. It's hard to get B-trains in them anymore. I mean I understand that. That's progress. That's the way it should be. But you know what CN [Canadian National] said? The siding, a local company wanted to buy it. No, we still run the siding. We're not going to let no cars on it. Same as Bladworth, used to be a producer car loading facility. CN says we're not letting nobody use the siding. You know that . . . There's no other elevators there except a local farmer bought it, but a business came back to try to work with it.

Thank God we got shortlines, same as I got from Davidson to Regina. You know, look what happened, look what happened in Aylesbury and Chamberlain now. There's businesses setting up, Mobil Grain, buying because it's shortline. And those are things that we're going to have to work with the federal government on that.

You know, when it comes to oil, I mean let's face it. He doesn't want pipelines. I don't think he cares about the oil, and you know, we have the federal NDP [New Democratic Party] with the Leap Manifesto which I think is worse than the *Regina Manifesto* when I've looked at them. And I mean it. I mean that's dangerous.

You look what happened with Earls. You look what happened to A&W, you know. They won't sell . . . For a while they weren't selling Canadian beef all because they've been treated. Well I'll tell you what. You have little kids, you treat them for disease so they don't get sick, so they don't die. You have a little calf, you treat it. You treat it with blackleg so it doesn't get sick and die. That's what the message is what they're saying out there, that our producers have unsafe beef, and that bothers me. That bothers me when they talk about that in . . . You get the social activists talking on that movement, all six of them here in Saskatchewan. That ought to get them tweeting a little bit right now. All I got to say to that is maybe you ought to just get a life.

You know, but they talk about agriculture in the Leap Manifesto. You know, we need to move back to sustainable agriculture. What does that mean? Mean I go back to Ipsco, see if my diskers are still there, that they haven't melted them down? You know, that's dangerous. We need to sell a product outside this province. We probably feed a billion people. We can't sell it locally. We can't bring our B-trains down to Albert Street and sell the lentils a cup at a time. You know, we need a government that'll stand up behind us when it comes to grain transportation and making deals.

They talk about the trans-pacific deal. They're still reviewing that. I mean that should be a no-brainer. That helps farmers. That moves our product out. We need, our farmers need and Saskatchewan needs to move this product, whether it's oil, whether it's agriculture products. There's no and, if, buts about it. We can't use it here all in Saskatchewan. We can't feed . . . There isn't a billion people here or more. We need that help

from the federal government. I don't know if we're going to get it. You know, and that's how we're going to keep Saskatchewan strong. We've got to keep fighting, and we're going to have a fight for a number of years I think when it comes to oil, when it comes to grain.

And, you know, this manifesto talks about shutting it down. That means refineries. That means trucking jobs. That means all the support industry. That means 50, 100,000 jobs gone, just like that. Then they just shut her down, you know, not even caring about the family, the people.

It's just not even that. It's natural gas. It's coal they want to shut down. I mean we're working to clean up coal. We have some of the most stringent environmental rules and regulations there is in the world when it comes to oil. For them to say that it's unsafe and that it's evil bothers myself, bothers constituents.

Because I'll tell you what. When I was going around door to door, and I won quite handily, I'll tell you, I used to get . . . They used to run the NDP down quite a bit at the door. I got more Liberals being run down, more people worried about what's going to happen in Ottawa, that's going to affect this province. It's going to try to shut it down. Those are some of the issues we're going to be facing.

This budget, keeping Saskatchewan strong speaks to what we're going to have to be doing for the next 5 to 10 years, of standing up for Saskatchewan. We've got the only Premier probably that's standing up for Western Canada. Finally the Alberta Premier finally come out a little bit on pipelines. She's finally starting to move. Because I've got a lot of friends and relatives there, and I think if she didn't she realized that she could really be . . . people storming the legislature. So they've come around a bit onto that but they've still . . . not moving as fast or getting behind our Premier as much as we need to. And we're going to need to fight for Western Canada because I think it's going to be suffering hugely as time moves on.

I hate to refer to documents like that but this document is taken very seriously by a lot of city people, a lot of Eastern people. And when parties federally or even provincially don't stand up and say you know what? You know, this is garbage. You know, a lot of the stuff in here doesn't even make sense. We need, you know . . . we're almost the only voice on there.

I haven't heard the provincial NDP stand up against it. I've heard their members say they didn't sign it and I take their word at that. I take their word that none of them signed it and I hope and I believe them. But still haven't heard them, you know, come out and say you know what, some of the stuff in there just doesn't make sense. You know, there's an odd . . . There's some little things that do, but not, you know, the big picture of just trying to take the province back and the world back to 100 years ago. That's not going to happen. You know, maybe 100 years ago it was a nicer place to live but things have changed, and things are going to keep changing. It's called progress. And what you do is you have to meet the challenges of progress.

And that's one of the things that this government has done very well at. I think that's why . . . And it showed in the support we get each and every election, in the support that I get in Arm River, that we move forward with progress. You just don't say,

you know what, we throw up our hands and we just can't keep going on. You know, as you face tougher issues, whether it be running a deficit or the challenge in health care, the challenges in highways, but we keep moving forward and we keep putting ideas out there.

The Liquor Board one is one that I never heard anybody on the door say, keep them. They say, you know, what's government's key role in running a government? What's its core services? Is it, like, selling liquor? And they said, no. You know, everybody said, no it's not. You know, we want health care. We want highways. We want money invested in education. We don't need to buy a new liquor store. Let the private industry run that. We're moving in that direction. But you do you know how long it took because of what happened in the past and the fearmongering over the years? But people are past that now. They're starting to see what you can do when you look outside the box, and we're going to keep looking outside the box.

Health has done an excellent job of looking outside the box. And what we've did with clinics is we've moved forward, and how we buy drugs and how we do other things, because we need to always keep looking forward as we keep moving this province. Because if we don't, you're going to end up stagnant. And that's what happened through many decades.

And I'll just say, it just wasn't their government. There was, you know, Liberals through the '60s. They did some things. But I look back in the past. They didn't move as fast, as quick. They probably could have. They did that whole, kind of, well, let's not make . . .

There's always an old saying: everybody wants progress but nobody wants change. But, you know, with progress has to come change. And we're starting to see that with people right now. We're starting to see the generation that's coming up and even the older generations saying, you know what? Why were we so stagnant for all them years? We have the most natural resources of the world, the most land, cattle industry, agriculture, research, you know, all the industries that come with that, oil. Why have we been so stagnant for all them years?

Finally we're moving and people are coming back. And you wait. This province hasn't even started to grow yet, hasn't even seen its best years yet because they're still coming and they're going to keep coming under this government and with this budget of keeping Saskatchewan strong.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood.

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise in the Assembly to join in the budget debate this evening.

Mr. Speaker, I started my Throne Speech reply with a question: what's a girl like me doing in a place like this? Tonight I will start with this question: what does a girl like me think of a budget like this?

I feel the need to start by reflecting on what I know about budgets. My father started his career as a life insurance agent and financial broker in 1951 and is still active in his profession today. That's 65 years worth of financial advice. He has kept

ledgers throughout his adult life and I follow the practice as well. He taught me that you need to know where you are spending your money. You need to control your expenses. That was my first experience with budgeting.

It is interesting to note that the Merriam-Webster online dictionary describes the historical definition of the economy as “the management of household . . . affairs and especially expenses.”

Mr. Speaker, my volunteer involvement with various organizations assisted me with gaining more knowledge about budgets. As president of the Lakeridge Community Association, I took responsibility for the annual budget. As president of the St. Luke parent council I took responsibility for the school year budget and I still have a copy of the budget that was sent to all school families for input in 2001.

As president of the CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] staff association for many years, I was responsible for that annual budget. I remember having a conversation with the vice-president of CTV Saskatchewan when I was elected as a trustee with the Greater Saskatoon Catholic board of education in 2003. I shared my concern about being responsible for that significant of an operating and capital budget, millions and millions of dollars. He assured me that I was just adding zeros; the principles were the same, and I would be fine.

Mr. Speaker, I share this with you to demonstrate that I take the responsibility of budgets and spending other people’s money very seriously. Being an elected member of this Assembly, I share in the responsibility of managing a \$14 billion budget. I remind myself that I am adding zeros and the principles remain the same.

Mr. Speaker, we have moved from a have-not province under decades of NDP mismanagement, where we had a dependence on federal equalization payments to fund our province, to a have province every year since the Saskatchewan Party was elected. I was reassured when our province’s credit rating was upgraded to AAA status, the highest possible rating. This rating confirms that the Saskatchewan Party government has a record of prudent spending, paying down the debt and keeping our GDP [gross domestic product] ratio the second lowest in the country. This rating is a vote of confidence for sound fiscal management and is tantamount to getting an A-plus on a report card.

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP government from 1991 to 2007, 56,000 more people moved out of this province than moved in. Since the Saskatchewan Party was elected in 2007, over 85,000 more people have moved into Saskatchewan than moved out.

[19:15]

With a population growth of approximately 132,000 people in the last 10 years, you could say that we have 132,000 more reasons to keep Saskatchewan strong. This government is staying true to its election promise that there would be no tax increases and no new taxes. This government has delivered nearly \$6 billion in tax reductions since 2007. A family of four with a combined income of \$50,000 has seen their income tax reduced by 100 per cent and will pay no provincial income tax

in 2016.

My husband, who owns a small business, is grateful that we now have one of the lower business income tax rates in the country. That’s because the Saskatchewan Party government delivered record income tax deductions since being elected and will not increase income tax during this budget year. This government did not want to increase the tax burden on Saskatchewan people and businesses. This is in contrast to the NDP government that raised taxes 21 times during their 16 years in power.

Here is what the vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had to say about our budget, and I quote:

I think small-business owners will be pleased with the direction of this budget, the fact that they are looking for the government to hold the line on taxes to ensure sustainable spending.

Saskatchewan individuals and families continue to pay the second lowest overall combined provincial taxes and utilities in the country. Mr. Speaker, we want to continue to attract people to our province. We want to continue to attract investment to our province.

Saskatchewan residents might ask why we would want our population to grow. We don’t see growth for the sake of growth. More people means an increased tax base to help address the health care, education, social services, and infrastructure needs of this province. More investment means more jobs and an increased tax base to help address the health care, education, social services, and infrastructure needs of this province. That’s why, as our Premier has said, and I quote, “The purpose of growth is to secure a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people.”

We need to control our operational spending. That was the purpose of my father’s ledger system, to set priorities and boundaries with our household financial management. That means facing the fact that we remain a resource-driven economy. There is a significant shortfall in non—renewable resource revenue from last year’s budget due to a significant drop in oil and potash prices.

There were difficult choices to make in order to manage the size of the deficit. We’re spending money we don’t have. It’s not easy to make tough decisions but, like our households, when times are challenging and we need to make adjustments to our spending, this government has also made these tough but necessary decisions.

Changes were made to programs. For example the children and seniors’ drug plan is rising by \$5 per prescription to \$25. My constituency in Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood has a high density of seniors and this could impact some of my residents.

There will be some social services and assistance program changes that will be introduced to increase fairness and equity and enhance sustainability in this coming year. But I also note that social services and assistance will see an increase of \$34 million or 2.8 per cent in this budget as this Saskatchewan Party government cares for those most vulnerable. I applaud the \$7.9

million for medically fragile children and those with complex needs as well as the \$5.7 million for foster care and extended family care in this budget to support Saskatchewan people in need.

Priority areas such as health, education, and social services continue to be supported, although the expense growth was not as large as past years. These three areas account for nearly three-quarters of our budget expenses.

It was encouraging to hear Dr. Pillay, president of the Saskatchewan Medical Association, state and I quote, “Given the fiscal constraints, I think it’s good to see the commitment of the Saskatchewan government in terms of funding our health care system to the extent that they have.”

Mr. Speaker, some might question the wisdom of moving forward with a budget that includes more than \$3.5 billion for infrastructure, the largest single-year capital investment in this province’s history. We need to move forward on our capital plan instead of delaying projects that would hurt our economy and cost more to build in the future. Investing in infrastructure adds to the strength of this province and establishes the structural framework to help the province’s economy. Our capital investment supports construction jobs, improves safety on roads, improves the transportation system that is vitally important in this export-driven province. It creates better learning spaces for children and helps in the delivery of quality health care and long-term care.

This budget provides significant investment into schools, health care facilities, and highways. We have more roads than any other province in Canada. It is a challenge to keep all those in good repair. As promised in the recent election campaign, the highways 2020 plan will provide \$70 million to repair and maintain highways across this province over the next three years. When the work is completed on the Regina bypass in 2019, it will improve transportation of goods and people in our province and increase traffic safety.

We will see the completion of 18 new elementary schools currently under construction on nine joint-use sites in Saskatoon, Regina, Martensville, and Warman in 2017. My constituents of Churchill-Wildwood will benefit from the north commuter parkway bridge that this government has committed \$50 million towards, along with the federal government and the city of Saskatoon, with 10 million for the bridge in this budget. My constituents will enjoy the new renovations at Holy Cross High School and École St. Matthew Elementary School.

My constituents will benefit from the reduction of regional health authority administration expenses by \$7.5 million and reinvesting those savings in front-line staff in long-term care homes. We heard on the doorsteps this campaign that reducing health region administration and providing better front-line care is important to Saskatchewan residents. Mr. Speaker, let me remind you that the NDP government eliminated 1,200 long-term care beds. Contrast this to the 15 new long-term care facilities that have been built or under construction since the election of the Saskatchewan Party government in 2007.

My constituents will benefit from the additional \$20 million to the Saskatchewan surgical initiative in this budget year to help

ensure that Saskatchewan continues to have the shortest surgical wait times in Canada. My constituents will appreciate the \$14 million in this budget for upgrades to Saskatoon’s Royal University Hospital.

My constituents will also benefit from the municipal revenue sharing based on one percentage point of the PST [provincial sales tax] or 20 per cent of the total that give Saskatoon more than \$48.5 million. I remember one of my daughters doing a policy paper on this very topic for a university class before it became a reality.

And my post-secondary graduate constituents will benefit from the changes to the graduate retention program that will allow recipients to use up to \$10,000 of their GRP [graduate retention program] benefits towards the down payment on their first home here in Saskatchewan.

School boards in Saskatoon will benefit from the additional \$5.4 million of school operating funding that is being targeted to support Syrian refugee students, as well as the new child care spaces that are being developed as part of the new joint-use schools in the neighbourhoods of Rosewood, Evergreen, Hampton Village, and Stonebridge.

As a Métis person, I applaud the \$5 million in ongoing funding for initiatives that support improving education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Métis people through the Ministry of Education. Mr. Speaker, let me remind you that under the NDP, from 2000 to 2007, Saskatchewan had the worst job creation in Canada, behind every single other province. The highest rate of First Nations unemployment was recorded under the NDP government at 29 per cent in March of 2006.

We understand the definition of an economy is the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in a given geographical area, but another definition is the careful management of available resources — frugality in expenditures, restraint. Which is why, Mr. Speaker, this government is looking towards transformational change in order to ensure that all government programs and services are viable and sustainable into the future. This government will work to ensure that there are high-quality public services delivered in the most effective and efficient way possible. Change pushes us out of our comfort zone. It challenges our sense of security, but change is how we grow and how we evolve. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who was known for his belief that change was central to the universe said, and I quote, “The only thing that is constant is change.”

Why a deficit, you ask. The projected \$434 million deficit is the balance needed to ensure the programs and services that Saskatchewan people need and value. It is sensible that this government runs a manageable deficit rather than making severe cuts to programs and services or increasing taxes for Saskatchewan people and businesses. Here is a quote from the Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce: “As long as they have a very clear path to find their way back to balance, we could support a very short-term deficit.”

Why an increase in public debt, you ask. I was raised to be allergic to debt. One of my father’s favourite sayings was, get

out from behind the eight ball, referring to the fact that imprudent money management and debt leaves one in a difficult situation with few options. This debt, however, is due to capital spending, spending that is needed to support the growth of this province. Unlike our neighbouring provinces, this government is committed to returning to a balanced budget by 2017-18.

The Saskatchewan Party's vision is to be the best place in Canada to live, to work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life. My husband, Jim, and I have done just that: got an education, lived, worked, raised a family, started a business, and built a life in this province that I love. Our three daughters were all educated at the University of Saskatchewan and are all employed in Saskatoon. We want the cycle to continue. It can and it will if we can keep Saskatchewan strong.

What does a girl like me think about a budget like this? We have considerable challenges to rise to. These challenges will test our mettle and our strength. In challenging economic times we find out what we are made of, Mr. Speaker. I believe this Saskatchewan Party government succeeded in finding the right balance between the reality of its revenue and the demands of its expenses. This budget finds a balance between managing our fiscal reality and providing the programs and services that are important to Saskatchewan people. This budget finds a balance between controlling spending, controlling the size of the deficit, and controlling borrowing for capital.

Mr. Speaker, let us remind ourselves that our province's economy will rebound as it has in the past. The Saskatchewan economy is diverse. The Saskatchewan economy is resilient, just like its people. The Premier has stated the Saskatchewan people are informed by common sense, that they are a veritable well of common sense. I believe Saskatchewan people will see the common sense in a manageable budget and that common sense will guide our transformational change.

As a government, we know we have lots of work to do. As a government, we are striving to do better. Mr. Speaker, my grandparents arrived in this province from lands far away seeking a better life, a better future for their families in this abundant province. We have that better future. We want that future looking bright with a budget that keeps our province strong and moving forward. Let our freshly clad copper dome of this legislature serve as a beacon of hope that our best days are still ahead. Let us remember that, here in Saskatchewan, hope beats fear.

Mr. Speaker, I support this budget moved by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Regina University. I do not support the opposition amendments. Thank you.

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

Ms. Beck: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to stand here today and deliver my remarks on the provincial budget as tabled by the Finance minister. Mr. Speaker, there is perhaps no greater indication of a government's priorities than the decisions that it makes at budget time. It is here that we see a clear demonstration of a government's values — that is, where the government chooses

to invest and where it sees fit to cut and what it chooses to ignore. I would like to illustrate some of the choices that this government made in this budget.

[19:30]

Mr. Speaker, like other members of this Assembly, I've spent a considerable amount of time on the doorstep over the past year, and a lot of time over the last week with this budget. I've weighed the latter against what people have told me on the doorstep, in my community, and in stakeholder meetings.

As we know, this budget was much anticipated throughout the province. Already much later than in previous years, the tabling of this budget signalled the end to a tense waiting game for many people in our province, for no sector more perhaps than education. Boards were made to formulate best-guess budgets in order to get staffing in place for the upcoming year. They were struggling to balance budgets at a time of great uncertainty. Rates of student need and class sizes have both been on the increase over several years and operational funding has not kept pace. That is not the first time that they have struggled with tight budgets that did not keep pace with growth. In fact, the past two budgets presented real challenges to school boards. However this was the first time that they had to do this so near the end of the school year, and with so little indication about what they might expect.

Mr. Speaker, this government wastes no opportunity to boast about increased population growth, and it is indeed a positive thing that people continue to choose to live and work in our province, both those who are new to our province and those who have been here all their lives. However, consistently we have witnessed that this government has failed to provide the adequate resources needed to keep pace with this growth, be it in education, be it in our universities, in health care, in seniors' care, or in the supports and services needed to provide timely mental health care or in the area of housing.

The Finance minister noted that there are years when unforeseen events make for difficult decisions. No one faults this government for the plight of world oil prices. That is beyond any one government's control. But, Mr. Speaker, I do think that it is a reasonable expectation that a government handed a resource windfall, a growing population, and a sizeable rainy day fund, that it is reasonable that such a government would have the forethought to save for the inevitable rainy day. I know many others share this view. Some have even written columns about it.

Mr. Speaker, besides speaking to priorities and values, budgets are also an opportunity to enact long-term planning and to invest in the shared future of this province. Given the gifts handed to this government, it is reasonable that they would take the opportunity to invest in measures to mitigate the boom and bust cycle and to invest meaningfully in renewable resources and sources of energy, to invest in services that would improve the quality of life today and in the future. And that is perhaps the most disappointing part of this budget. This government has had nearly a decade — eight years, five months — of record revenues to meaningfully invest in our future. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that they failed to take advantage of the opportunity handed to them. Not only that; as we know, they

drained the rainy day fund in the process.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again in this Assembly, when asked about current conditions, when asked direct questions about issues facing people in the province today, time and again this government and its ministers inevitably respond with a laundry list of grievances against the NDP and governments going back 12, 15, 20 years or even further.

Mr. Speaker, people that I talk to want their government focused on today and a government that takes a long-term view of this province, its people, and its resources. What people want, anyone who comes forward with a legitimate concern or issue, they do not . . . what they do not want is answers about what another government did 20 years ago, and that expectation crosses party lines. People want to know that someone is listening and understanding the conditions as they exist today.

It is also reasonable, Mr. Speaker, that any government operating in today's world would take seriously the challenges facing us with regard to climate change, prepare for the impacts of these changes — increased flooding, drought, fire activity, as well as impacts on our water and crop production — and take seriously the need to invest meaningfully in renewable energy and take action to protect our natural habitats to ensure a high quality of life for those who will come after us.

This government, called environmental laggards in a national news article, continues to lag as if with pride. In the interests of all in our province, those who work in resource industries, those who rely on forests and crops, on our water supply, this government has a responsibility to take action and transition towards a more sustainable future. This budget does none of that.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also came up short for our students, from the pre-K [pre-kindergarten] level right through to university. Mr. Speaker, some students will undoubtedly benefit from a boost on a down payment on their first home. But, Mr. Speaker, there are too many students who are also picking up a crushing debt along with their diplomas. These students need a break on tuition costs or in the form of a bursary before they can even think of buying a home.

As I have already drawn attention to repeatedly, front-line funding and capital funding, particularly to address maintenance and crowding in the K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] system, is also of serious concern. This budget provides but a pittance, the \$1.2 million increase in terms of funds targeted to the classroom. Not enough to cover the costs of basic inflation, not enough to cover already negotiated increases for teaching and non-teaching staff, not enough to buffer increased power bills. And so with this budget, class sizes will grow, educational assistants will be cut, needs will go on unaddressed. And that is not conjecture. That is a fact, and it is already happening, as we saw in Sask Rivers today. And if precedent holds, this government will shift responsibility for those cuts onto school boards, onto school boards who have already lost the ability to set their own mill rates and who have been left for seven years with an interim funding model. Or perhaps they will blame governments past, another favourite.

Mr. Speaker, when teachers, parents, school boards, students

tell us that children today are struggling with issues more intense and complex than those 25 years ago, when they tell us the class sizes and the diversity of need in our classrooms has increased and that funding is not keeping up, they are not concerned about what was or was not done for students long graduated. They want to know that the supports that they need to meet the needs of children and students today are understood. And they do not want to be dismissed, told what someone else did while they were in power, or told to look under the couch cushions or under desks for basic resources needed to put teachers in front of kids or to provide needed supports.

They want to know that their government understands and is listening. But most of all they want to know that students are valued enough to invest the funds needed to ensure that they get the education that they deserve, the education that we all need all of our children in this province to receive in order to achieve our best future.

But as I mentioned, it's not just the K to 12 system impacted. I'm going to take some time to focus on early childhood. In researching for this statement, I came across an article that caught my attention. The recent article from the Washington institute speaks to the value of public investment in quality early childhood supports and services. It is noted that such investments have been proven to "boost educational achievement, improve economic growth rates, and raise standards of living across the income spectrum." That is for all citizens, Mr. Speaker.

Such investments also improve the economy's competitiveness long into the future, while at the same time ease a host of fiscal, social, and health problems. Further, Mr. Speaker, choosing to invest in such programming provides a wide array of significant benefits to children, families, and society as a whole. Investments in early childhood have additional, long-lasting benefits across society and throughout lifespans: improved readiness for the K to 12 system regardless of socio-economic background, reduced need for educational supports while in school, reduced rates of child abuse and the need for protective services, reduced criminal activity, improved high school and university graduation rates, and still more.

Once these children enter the labour force, their incomes are higher, and so are the taxes that they pay back to society. Finally as adults they are likely to be in better health, with lower incidences of depression. A pretty impressive list, Mr. Speaker.

But what I found most interesting about this article, which speaks specifically about universal, voluntary, pre-K programming for three- and four-year-olds, is this: "A voluntary, high-quality, publicly funded universal prekindergarten education program serving all 3- and 4-year-old children would generate annual benefits that would surpass the annual cost of the program within eight years" — surpass.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence amongst economists, educational professionals, and a host of other scholars is clear. An investment in education — particularly early childhood education, but in all areas of education — is not only an important investment in our children, which is paramount. It is also an investment in the betterment of our society, our

communities, and our economy, period.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you that you do not need to be a scholar or an expert to recognize the benefits of investing in early childhood education and supports. And the members opposite have indicated they want ideas. Well here is one that is well researched, has lasting impacts across the economy, and pays for itself and more within eight years. It is also the right thing to do for our kids.

So what did this government do with this budget? They reduced supports for our youngest. Early years funding in this budget is down almost \$240 million. KidsFirst, a program that provides much-needed services and supports to some of the most vulnerable children in our province, sees no increase in this budget despite growing numbers of vulnerable kids. The same is true for the early childhood intervention programs: no increase.

Mr. Speaker, I know that this government has spent money. We hear about it every day in this Assembly again and again. But, Mr. Speaker, prudent governance does not just mean throwing money around. This government was handed a situation that governments around the country and around the world could envy: a resource boom; a growing population; an abundance of resources; strong, profitable Crown corporations; and an array of public assets.

Mr. Speaker, for over eight years this government has had record revenues. They have put money into health care but failed to invest in measures that would improve health and wellness and thus reduce the pressure on our health care system. In this budget, they have asked seniors and children to pay more for prescription drugs. But when a senior halves their medication because they cannot afford the whole dose — something that I was told on the doorstep — that is not only shameful; that has very real impacts for their long-term health and health care costs.

I also ran into families, students, as well as seniors struggling to make ends meet. They told me that their wages and income simply had not kept pace with the rising cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, \$5 might seem a pittance to members opposite, but these increases most harm those who are already having to choose between rent and groceries. Food bank use in this province grew at an alarming rate during the boom under this government. The rate of food bank use shamefully grew fastest amongst seniors and children. Now that more difficult times have arrived, who is the first in line to pay the price? Seniors and students.

And it's not just prescription drug costs, Mr. Speaker. In a background document released with the budget, the minister, when describing cuts to social services — making use of doublespeak that would make Orwell blush, I might add — euphemistically describes the impact of some significant cuts. On the elimination of the rental housing supplement for those on the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] program, adults with disabilities, the minister states that this move will "... ensure that SAID clients will receive more equitable shelter benefits." Equitably inadequate.

When describing the elimination of the exemption for seniors receiving SAID — these are poor, elderly, disabled folks — the minister states that this will "... restore simplicity and fairness in how income is treated under SAP and SAID." Simply inadequate.

Mr. Speaker, this abusive language might be funny were the consequences not so cruel. Mr. Speaker, what this government has proposed with its transformational change agenda on its surface appears to propose nothing more than what anyone charged with making decisions in any size organization should already be doing: making sure that services are provided in an efficient manner within the scope of what they are mandated to do. And that is what government should have been doing all along. And if they haven't, why not?

However, I have little confidence that this exercise is what it appears to be on the surface. Mr. Speaker, the government has dug themselves a big hole and has signalled that they expect to be out of it by the next budget. But, Mr. Speaker, this government has already provided some signals as to how this will be achieved.

[19:45]

Mr. Speaker, this government who has wasted money hand over fist, this government who chose, for reasons few can fully comprehend, chose to add three more MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. This government is now pointing fingers at school principals suggesting that they should be doing more, hinting that locally determined teachers' benefits and preparation time should go under the knife. The minister has also suggested that boards reign in administrative and governance costs. Mr. Speaker, school boards spend around 3 per cent of their budget on these areas. Upwards of 85 per cent of their budgets are spent on the front line and keeping the lights on in the schools.

Mr. Speaker, of course school boards need to be held accountable for the dollars that they receive, and they are, through the auditor's reports and annual reports. And they should be accountable for the quality of education that they provide to our students, something that this government is making difficult by failing to provide the resources needed to meet the costs associated with growth and increased need.

What is more troubling, Mr. Speaker, is that education, along with health, seem to be singled out to receive the stick, while others are offered the carrot that the Premier has recently mused about. Mr. Speaker, I think that this speaks to the government's tendencies to pick winners and losers, to reward some and punish others.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, it is true that this government won a majority on April 4th. They won the right to govern. Mr. Speaker, the right to govern is very different from the right to rule unopposed or without consultation. It is not the right to do what you want without listening to evidence, ideas, hopes, or concerns from across the province, even from those who disagree with your policies.

Mr. Speaker, it is relatively easy to govern when the money is rolling in. What is more difficult is making smart investments,

sound policy decisions, and building towards a prosperous future for all citizens when times are tough. Mr. Speaker, in tough times this government failed to deliver. With this budget they have chosen to single out those who already benefited least from boom times — seniors, children, those in poverty, those in the North — to pay for their failings.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons and more, I will be voting against this budget and in favour of the amendment. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Mr. Docherty: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise today in support of the budget tabled by the Finance minister.

But first, since this is my opportunity to respond to the budget and address the Assembly, I have a few acknowledgements to make. To my family and friends, thank you for your support throughout the previous term and through the campaign to keep me here for a second term. Serving the people of Coronation Park has been one of the greatest honours of my life and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to continue that service. To the people of Coronation Park, I am humbled by the faith you've placed in me and I promise to work on your behalf to serve the community and its people.

Coronation Park is a very, very diverse constituency, Mr. Speaker, diversity with newcomers from all over the world, Mr. Speaker, and diversity in its schools, from the Huda School to the Mother Teresa Middle School to community schools, Mr. Speaker. We have a wealth of diversity, and I'm happy and proud to be able to serve.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the people who worked so hard to help me return to the Assembly. Our campaign team won one of the most challenging races in the entire province, Mr. Speaker. Their hard work, their dedication, and their determination was inspiring. To my spousal unit and my campaign manager, Lisa Danyluk, thank you. And what a campaign she ran. To our core campaign team, Jennifer Hartung, David Keogan, Reagan Seidler, Ellen Williams, Caitlin Lane-Graham, Clint Fox, and Alyssa Phen, thank you for showing up day after day, walking hundreds of kilometres, and knocking on thousands of doors.

Thanks also to friends, Keith and Lisa Pratt, Mark and Pam Fox, Remi Mike, newly elected chief Myke Agecoutay and his then very pregnant wife, Natasha Gladue, who somehow found time during their own campaign to lend me their support and well wishes. Congratulations to you both on the birth of your twins, Nariah and Chicago.

Thanks as well to my constituency assistant, Kristy Shaw, who sadly had to miss election day, but for the very best of reasons, having just become a brand new mother to a little girl, Kodi Lynne. Congratulations on your beautiful little girl and thanks for helping Coronation Park grow. But I'm still wondering, what's wrong with naming your child Doc? But apparently that didn't go over well, but we'll keep working on it.

I'd also like to thank our youngest volunteer, Miss Ava

Hartung, who kept smiles on our faces and beat me at several games — well all the games actually — throughout the campaign. Without all of you I would not be here today.

To the friends and family who joined us evenings, weekends, and whenever they had a spare moment, who helped all the way along and volunteered on election day, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, the men and women who volunteered on campaign teams and voted on election day have done their part. They've exercised their democratic right and have placed the future of this province in our hands.

So now it is our turn, our turn to shoulder the responsibility they've given us, ever mindful of the honour and privilege that it is to serve. Our turn to do what we promised them we would do — to keep our promises, to keep our economy and our province strong despite these challenging times, to maintain the services people and families rely on, to invest in critical infrastructure, to be prudent in our expenses and expenditures, and to reflect the priorities of Saskatchewan families and communities. Mr. Speaker, this budget sets out how we will do all of those things.

We promised the people of Saskatchewan that despite difficult economic times we would not raise their taxes and we would not create any new taxes. This budget keeps that promise — no new taxes, no new tax increases. Saskatchewan maintains some of the lowest personal and business tax burdens in Canada, according to the Conference Board of Canada. And by keeping taxes low, we're helping Saskatchewan families keep more of their hard-earned money.

Let's look at maintaining services people and families rely on, Mr. Speaker. This budget is . . . We're talking about transformational change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, here's some reactions to the budget:

If you can deliver services to a customer, in this case a citizen of the province, in a way that they need for a lower, better cost, one ought to do that because we know that resources have demands on them all over and this isn't about necessarily reducing people, in fact it's directing people resources and human resources to the area of most positive impact. So we have continued to support them on that front.

That's from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

"We are very happy that they are doing transformational change." That's from Steve McLellan, CEO [chief executive officer] of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

"We're actually excited with the concept of being able to go forward with transformational change. That's the way we think anyway, so we're aligned with government in that regard." That's Dave Button, vice-president of the U of R [University of Regina].

"We like to see the commitment to transformational change and controlling spending." That's Todd MacKay, Prairie director of

the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. And lastly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “We’re looking forward to this transformational change exercise.” That’s Marilyn Braun-Pollon, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of my first roles in government was to serve as the Legislative Secretary for disability issues. During my time working with members of the disability community, I heard over and over again what a game changer the Saskatchewan assured income for disability was, or SAID. The SAID benefit has been . . . No matter where I went, from small rural communities to large urban cities, everyone agreed that SAID has given people experiencing disability a dignified alternative to social assistance.

And while I’m no longer in that role, Mr. Speaker, it remains near and dear to my heart. One of my favourite constituency activities is to gather several times a year with the men and women who live at Huston Heights, an affordable independent living housing complex for adults with disabilities. That’s why I’m so proud that this year’s budget includes a \$9.6 million increase to SAID, and that’s to ensure more people are covered, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have increased SAID benefits four times in the last four years. That’s a record I am proud to stand by, and unlike the record of the members opposite who ignored 16 years of demands for a separate assured income for disability, for people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to talk about doom and gloom. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite seem to channel a number of fictional type characters. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you could, if you’d indulge me, I’d like to utilize a little skit I’ve watched and said a couple times in this House, but there’s new members here and it does . . . I don’t get tired of it.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to channel *Saturday Night Live*. And at one point we had Lothar, Lothar of the Hill People, Mr. Deputy Speaker, came up to his dad and said, “Look, Dad, look what I found. I found this disc, this stone disc, and it’s got a . . . And I stuck a stick in the middle of it, Dad, and it rolls. It actually rolls down the road. And so I took our box and I stuck it on top and, Father, look — it rolls. And it’s going to make our work easier. It’s going to make all of our burden an awful lot less.”

Lothar says to his son, “Son, that’s a good idea, might even be a great idea. But it’s a new idea and, because it’s a new idea, we must fear and reject it.”

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I’d also like to congratulate some of the re-elected members. And I’ve called them in the past either Pinocchio or Geppetto, or Eeyore, to Chicken Little or Turkey Lurkey because the sky is constantly falling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our government knows how important it is to support individuals and families. We also know how important it is to work together with our municipalities. That’s why I’ve been so committed to providing our partners and municipal government with stable, predictable funding through municipal revenue sharing.

Municipalities will receive close to \$272 million through

revenue sharing this year, the largest revenue sharing grant ever from the province to municipalities. That’s an increase of \$6.4 million this year alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and an increase of \$144 million since 2007. Given the challenging economic times, this demonstrates our government’s strong commitment to municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As an MLA for Regina, I’ve gotten to know the mayor and the men and women of Regina City Council, and while we may not necessarily all agree on each and every issue, where our paths cross we do agree that this funding commitment is an important one. To quote the *Leader-Post*: “Communities, both urban and rural, will see record revenue sharing and hiked funding for municipal infrastructure.”

Now, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to discuss this year’s budget in a context of my ministry. I often tell people that I have one of, if not the absolute best portfolios in government. Yesterday I was looking for a really good description of why I think that’s so true, and I came across one of the best descriptions I’ve ever found right in this year’s Estimates book:

The Ministry supports, celebrates and builds pride in Saskatchewan. The Ministry’s strategic focus is on quality of life and economic growth. The Ministry works with diverse groups and communities to enhance the Province’s cultural, artistic, recreational and social life; promote excellence in the arts, culture, heritage and sport; and support a vibrant and growing arts and cultural community. The Ministry manages and enhances Saskatchewan’s provincial parks system, conserves ecosystems and cultural resources, and provides recreational and interpretive opportunities for parks visitors.

Mr. Speaker, what’s not to like about a job like that? Well maybe besides the influx of tent caterpillars we got, but other than the tent caterpillars, I think we’re doing pretty good.

Before I discuss the details of the budget with respect to my ministry, I want to thank the staff in my ministry, in my minister’s office. Ours is a very busy office and the people in it make a real difference. So I’d like to thank chief of staff Amanda Plummer, ministerial assistants Bob Krawchuk and Dylan Pollon, administrative assistants Carla Taylor-Brown and Morgan Tangjerd, who may have the most difficult job of all, Mr. Speaker, and that’s keeping me organized, which is impossible probably, but they’ve done a pretty darn good job.

Last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government fulfilled our previous commitment of \$10 million in parks capital investment over four years, and in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have further committed another \$5.05 million in capital, Mr. Speaker. I compare that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the NDP record of provincial parks funding. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the NDP government allowed many of the facilities in Saskatchewan’s beautiful provincial parks to fall into a serious state of disrepair.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party government has increased capital funding to provincial parks by 249 per cent in our first nine years of government compared to the NDP’s last nine years. That funding has been used to create nearly 2,100 new electrified campsites and repair and rebuild park facilities

like bathrooms, boat launches, and visitor centres. As a result, visits to Saskatchewan's provincial parks have increased by over 860,000 or 29 per cent since 2007.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget also includes stable funding of almost \$7 million for the Saskatchewan Arts Board to support the arts in Saskatchewan by supporting artists, arts organizations, and communities. This funding will support programs, services, and grants that will promote a vibrant arts community and help artists turn their passions into works of art.

[20:00]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year's budget also provides almost \$7.7 million for Creative Saskatchewan to promote the commercialization of creative products and help our province's creative talent market their creativity both here at home, in Canada, and internationally, through grants, mentoring, marketing, and partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly proud of our government's firm commitment in these challenging economic times to this province's creative industries and to the men and women whose talent produces works of art that inspire so many of us.

In these challenging times, I'm happy to report that many of my ministry's areas of focus are receiving stable funding: Royal Saskatchewan Museum, a slight increase; Provincial Capital Commission and Government House, a slight increase; the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, stable; heritage institutions of Saskatchewan and the Science Centre, stable; Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation, stable; Community Initiatives Fund, with a slight decrease of about \$20,000 out of a \$9.2 million budget; community sport, culture, recreation programs, an increase of \$750,000 to 3.4 million; and regional parks funding, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget recognizes the important role that Parks, Culture and Sport play in enhancing the quality of life of the people of this great province, but this year's budget also reflects the challenging economic times our province faces, Mr. Deputy Speaker. While much of my ministry's budget remains stable, difficult decisions had to be made. My ministry could not be immune to the necessity of controlling spending. We could not shirk our duty to help maintain a responsible budget in these challenging economic times, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had to do our part, just as all ministries did. From Health to Social Services, large and small, we all had to help the Minister of Finance table a budget that was responsible and attainable and that will support a return to balance in 2018.

Yesterday the members opposite asked about urban parks funding. During this year's budget deliberations, we looked at all items in my ministry's budget and made some difficult decisions, most notably eliminating funding for five urban parks. This does not mean that parks will close. These parks will continue to be assets to the urban municipalities and to provide benefits to the quality of life of the residents in those cities.

Now we believe that municipalities would be in a better position to absorb funding, given record municipal revenue-sharing grant increases, increases of more than 100 per

cent overall since 2007-08. Mr. Deputy Speaker, revenue sharing with these specific municipalities has increased significantly from 2007 to 2015, in most cases by more than 150 per cent. This was a difficult choice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but in times like the ones we find ourselves in, it is our responsibility as government to make tough decisions to ensure that the budget we bring down this year is responsible, sustainable, and can support a return to balance in 2018.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, choices between infrastructure, choices between cancer drugs, choices between more surgeries for Saskatchewan people, or funding urban parks when municipalities have received huge increases in revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, we're going to choose to focus on health care and things that are clear and an obvious obligation. Mr. Speaker, I wonder who, who said that. Who's that quote from? Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was our Premier.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for shouldering a heavy burden and for working so hard to get us so far. Thanks as well to my colleagues who serve on treasury board for guiding our discussions. Finally, my sincere thanks to the men and women of my ministry for the commitment to serving the people of Saskatchewan each and every day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm proud to stand here today in support of our government's budget. I will be supporting the motion by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Regina University. I will not be supporting the amendments. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Dennis: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to rise today in the Assembly to support the Minister of Finance on the 2016-2017 budget. This budget will keep Saskatchewan strong, with no tax increases, controlled spending, investing in our people and in infrastructure in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, it's a hard act to follow, the minister of Regina Coronation Park, after his thoughts today. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin my remarks with a few acknowledgements. In a very short time I have noticed the value of my two CAs [constituency assistant], Carol Sleeva who has been working for the past 11 years and has worked for former deputy premier, Ken Krawetz. She brings me a lot of experience and knowledge. Also my new CA, Gladys Zavislak, and who I look forward to working for over the next few years.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my wife, Lorri, and my three children, Jasmine and her husband Shane, Jade and Carson, and of course my one and only grandson, Lewis. They have been a great support throughout the campaign and election and now my new position as MLA of Canora-Pelly constituency.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first budget that I have had the opportunity to take part under the Saskatchewan Party government, which shows fiscal responsibility that will keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this time to thank our former Finance minister, deputy premier, minister of Education, and one of the greatest men to ever work in the Sask Party, Mr. Ken Krawetz. His hard work and dedication to this province over his last 20 years will never be forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank our current Finance minister and all those that helped him putting this great budget together. I know there are some tough decisions with revenues down nearly \$1 billion — with a “b”, billion — with no tax increases and controlled spending while investing in infrastructure to keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, the government continues to support the early education and child care across this province. As part of the new joint-use school project, over 800 child care spaces will be developed in Regina, Saskatoon, Warman, and Martensville, which are coming this year. This brings the total funding of child care to \$53 million. The number of licensed child care spaces have increased by over 5,800 since 2008, bringing the total to more than 14,600. And since 2007 we've had 70 new daycare spaces located in Canora.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also maintains strong investment in post-secondary students in education. There's \$475 million allocated to the University of Regina and affiliated colleges, \$156 million to Saskatchewan Polytechnic and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, and another \$29 million to the Saskatchewan regional colleges including one that was newly opened, Trades and Technology Centre in Yorkton.

Mr. Speaker, we know that resource revenue is down by nearly \$1 billion. This government decided not to raise the taxes in this year's budget but to run a manageable deficit rather than severe cuts to our programs and services. This focus will be on managing cost, sustainability, and looking forward to transformational changes. Under the NDP, taxes were raised 21 times in 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, health care is very important to the people of Saskatchewan. With over \$5 billion being spent or 39 per cent of our total budget, we will continue to move forward. And now we have the shortest surgical wait times in Canada. And under the NDP, Saskatchewan had the longest surgical wait times in Canada with thousands of patients having to wait for more than a year for their surgery.

Since 2007 we have brought in 650 more doctors, over 3,200 more nurses. We have increased physician training by 40 seats and the number of nurse training seats by 270 since 2007. The health budget is an increase of 57.4 million. That is now an increase of over 50 per cent since the NDP in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, regional authorities will see 3.4 billion for operating fund, an increase of \$2.3 million — a 56 per cent increase since 2007. This is included in the \$20 million in additional funding to reduce surgical wait times that are now the best in Canada.

The Sask Cancer Agency is receiving an additional 9.8 million, up 6.2 per cent to pay for 15 new cancer drugs approved last year. And since 2007, funding for the Cancer Agency is up 113 per cent. Mr. Speaker, there will also be \$7.5 million reduction

in administration. These dollars will be reinvested into the front-line in long-term care homes.

Mr. Speaker, the government will continue in capital investments across this province: 71.4 million, including a 25 per cent increase of 34.7 million to capital maintenance for power plant upgrade in the Saskatoon Royal University Hospital; electrical projects at the Regina General and Pasqua hospitals; as well as the completion of the Kelvington integrated care facility.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to build highways, schools, hospitals through these difficult years. This year the government will be investing 3.5 billion in capital. One point seven billion will be invested to highways, schools, and hospitals, and another 1.8 billion invested into the infrastructure for SaskPower, SaskTel, and SaskEnergy.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that all of these builds in our province only creates more jobs and more spending in our province. Saskatchewan has the lowest unemployment rate in Canada. Since 2008 the number of people working in Saskatchewan has grown by 68,000. From 2000 to 2007 under the NDP, we had the worst job creation in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, not only did we not raise taxes during the tough times but, in Saskatchewan since 2008, we have delivered record property tax reductions and record income tax reductions. For example, a family of four with a combined total of \$50,000 income have seen the income tax reduced by 100 per cent. And we gave back about \$6 billion in taxes to the people of Saskatchewan. Under the NDP, what did they do? They raised taxes 21 times in 16 years of power. They also raised the PST four times and the gas tax twice.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture will see an increase of 7.5 per cent to a total of 389.89 million, point eight million. The business risk management program have shown an increase of a total of 254.6 million. Ag research will receive 26.8 million in funding. There will be a change to the sale of Crown land which will end on December 31st and it's expected to net \$148 million in land sales this year.

This budget also contains 4.2 million to support program and events such as the Canada Farm Progress Show, 4-H Saskatchewan, and Agriculture in the Classroom. These commitments show the government's continuing support in the agriculture sector to support the Saskatchewan economy and ensures that producers will continue to feed the world.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to a record 1.15 billion which is going to be spent on our highways and infrastructure in 2016-17: 355 million for capital construction, 30 million for new funding for the first year of the highways 2020 plan, a three-year plan of 70 million addition to highway repairs, 500 million for the Regina bypass. There will be more than 1300 kilometres of repairs to our highways across the province, and projects include the Regina bypass, twinning of Highways 7 and 16 near Saskatoon, twinning of Highway 39 between Estevan and Bienfait, starting of new overpasses in Warman and Martensville, and 200 kilometres of repaving, upgrading our rural, over 100 rural highways. These are all roads that were neglected under the NDP.

[20:15]

Mr. Speaker, this government has a record of record funding over 406 million for municipal revenue support. This is a \$56.7 million increase, or 16.2 per cent from 2015-16, and a whopping 67.9 since 2007. Municipal revenue shares for the cities, towns, villages, and RM [rural municipality] of 174.6; revenue sharing for rural and organized hamlets, 76.7 million; and approximately 20 million for northern municipalities. This funding is up 144 million, or 113 per cent since 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the government has dedicated more than \$1 billion, a 5.1 per cent increase from the last year, to our social programs for our children, youth, and families, people with disabilities, and people needing income assistance and housing. Dedicating 7.9 million for the medically fragile children, 5.7 for foster care and extended family, 2.3 in preservative families to keep our children from coming into the care of the ministry, and point eight million for assisted adoption. In 2016-17, the province is dedicating to social services 494 million for income assistance programs, \$210 million to the SAID program, the Saskatchewan assured income for disability. There is 36.5 million allocated to the transitional employment program. These programs and others will serve over 30,000 individuals and families to meet their basic needs.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016-17 budget maintains strong support for our First Nations and Métis programming. This is over \$211 million allocated for the First Nations and Métis people to access economic and educational opportunities, 30.8 million for on-reserve adult basic education, 5.1 per cent of . . . million dollars for funding initiatives to respond to the joint task force on improving educational and employment opportunities, \$78.8 million in gaming agreement transfers. This budget will also include funding to hire additional wildfire crews and for the First Nations apprenticeship program in the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I look at our export industry. I see diversity and continued growth. Last year in Saskatchewan, export industries reached over \$15 billion. That was the target projected to be hit by 2020 and we're already there.

The government's track record over the last nine years includes prudent paying down of debt and keeping our debt-to-GDP ratio among the lowest in the country. All this has helped us to obtain a AAA credit rating that is among the highest in North America.

Mr. Speaker, in 2016-17 the budget also includes \$50.8 million in funding for municipalities, 16.9 million for policing grants, 11.1 million to libraries, 7.9 for grants in lieu of taxes for municipalities and libraries, 5.5 million for urban parks, 3.5 million for transit assistance for people with disabilities, 1.8 million for the bus pass program, 1.7 for community rinks, 1.2 million for rural physician recruitment, \$700,000 for the community airport partnership program, and \$500,000 for the irrigation bridge rehabilitation.

Mr. Speaker, my constituency of Pelly will benefit from this budget, and indeed has benefited since the Sask Party took leadership in 2007. And I'd like to give you a few examples. Revenue sharing in Canora went from 206,000 to 511,000, 148

per cent increase. Kamsack, revenue sharing is up 185,000 to 420, 127 per cent. Preeceville, revenue sharing increased from 108,000 to 247,000, 127 per cent increase.

We also showed investments in education. In Norquay in 2008, a \$1.1 million project. In Kamsack in 2009, a roof replacement of 225,000. In 2010, a new roof on the Canora Junior Elementary of 160,000. And 2014, the Canora Junior Elementary put a three-classroom new modular in their junior elementary to the tune of 900,000. The total amount spent on pre-K to grade 12 school capital allocated since 2007 is \$6.4 million. We have 70 child care spaces allocated in 2007, and our Good Spirit School Division has had an operating increase of over 35.6 per cent since 2007.

Investments in health since 2009: Preeceville and District Health Centre was built and there was \$6.7 million invested. And just last year in 2015, Canora Health and Wellness Centre and the collaborative emergency was set up at the hospital, and there was \$775,000 worth of renovations.

In highways, in 2015-16 there was \$4.2 million in culvert replacements and bridge replacements. And our infrastructure in the area, in 2008 there was a cultural centre in Sturgis built and we gave \$250,000. In 2009, Kamsack sewage lagoon expansion of over 800,000. And there is much, much more.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to say a few things about my 14 years as mayor of Canora. The first seven years, from 2000 to 2007 under the NDP and Premier Lorne Calvert, taxes were high on the farms and businesses. They tried to close our hospital, and we fought hard and kept it open. They shut down our Canora ag office. People were graduating, leaving our town and our province. We saw a decrease in population, and there was much, much more. Mr. Speaker, from 2007 to 2016 under the current government, revenue sharing more than doubled so that we were allowed to do more infrastructure within the area.

Our population of Canora grew from 2,300 to over 2,800. We built three more classrooms in the junior school, 70 more daycare spaces. And our area benefited from the municipal portion of farm land taxes going down over 80 per cent — more money to our people of our area.

We had a new health clinic and a CEC [collaborative emergency centre] set up in Canora last year of \$1.1 million. Mr. Speaker, we have a saying back home, the NDP didn't care about the little farmers and business in rural Saskatchewan. They didn't care about business. They were used to signing the back of the cheque, not at the front of the cheque.

Mr. Speaker, this budget will continue to build our infrastructure. This budget will control our spending. This budget will continue to grow our province. Mr. Speaker, this budget will keep Saskatchewan strong by keeping our finances strong and help us towards a balanced budget in 2017-2018.

Mr. Speaker, I am in support of the 2016-17 budget, and I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cypress Hills.

Mr. Steele: — Mr. Speaker, the 2016-17 budget commits to building a solid foundation during these challenging times. We will continue to look after and keep the best interests of the people in Saskatchewan.

We are not off-loading the budget or stress onto the hard-working families, individuals, or businesses in the province. More people than ever call Saskatchewan home. Instead of people leaving our province to invest elsewhere, they are staying in our province or moving here to invest.

The government has also taken a close look at our revenue sources to ensure that they are sustainable and to guard against too much dependence on volatile revenue sources such as oil and potash.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure the sustainability of high-quality public services delivered in a most efficient way, effective way as possible, this year marks the beginning of the government-wide process of transformational change. As part of this process, everything the government does will be studied and scrutinized. Transformational change cannot be achieved overnight, and it cannot be accomplished by government alone. We will look at both the spending and revenue sides of the equation as we strive to find a proper, sustainable balance between the two.

Mr. Speaker, our main goal is to keep Saskatchewan strong by keeping our economy strong, now and into the future. We now have over 1.14 million people since 2007. Our province saw a population decline under the NDP leadership. Today we boast an increase of over 132,000 people.

Oil revenue has been a financial blessing to our province over the years. This past year it has been on the downturn, which there's no doubt has given us challenges in our financial budget. We are ready to meet this challenge, keeping Saskatchewan strong while we continue to move forward.

Saskatchewan remains a resource-driven economy with an abundance of oil, natural gas, uranium, and potash. With the province in the global downturn of oil, we are excited to announce that there will be no increase to personal income tax and no additional new taxes.

We have reduced taxes for Saskatchewan people at every level. We realize that no increase of taxes is key for a strong economy. Low taxes attract new economic activity to create new jobs and investments throughout our province. Since 2007 there has been nearly 6 billion in total tax reductions for families, individuals, businesses, and farmers. We are among the lowest in provincial and personal tax burden in Canada. The NDP government raised the taxes 21 times during 16 years in power, including raising the PST four times and the gas tax twice.

Even though we are going through some rough times, we are still maintaining the infrastructure. It will keep the economy growing, create jobs, make it easier to move products, and sustain economic growth. This investment will improve the quality of life for generations that follow. These smart, strategic investments will help grow our economy and make Saskatchewan an even better place to call home.

Mr. Speaker, as government, as society, as families, as individuals, we must be grateful to those before us who dedicated their lives to laying the infrastructure of our livelihood today. Let's continue where they left off and build upon it.

Mr. Speaker, the budget maintains a strong investment in early education, child care, post-secondary students, and education to keep Saskatchewan strong.

The budget includes funding of 1.6 million for nearly 200 previously approved child care spaces. The number of child care spaces have increased close to 5,800 since 2008, totalling more than 14,600 spaces throughout the province. Eastend, Hazlet, Frontier, Gull Lake, Shaunavon, and Cabri are some of the many early childhood centres that provide nurturing education care for the children of Cypress Hills constituency. These early childhood centres ensure a safe, clean, engaging environment for the children, allowing parents to go to work with peace of mind knowing their children are being well taken care of.

We are the teachers for our youth. It's up to us to make sure they are getting the tools they need to succeed and move forward, encouraging them, supporting them, and celebrating their successes. Mr. Speaker, we introduced one of the most aggressive graduate retention programs in Canada that allow students who have graduated from post-secondary education to be eligible for tax credits up to \$20,000 if they become and remain residents of Saskatchewan. Over 63,000 graduates have taken advantage of this program since 2007.

We are introducing a new program to allow eligible post-secondary graduates to use up to \$10,000 of their future GRP tax credits as an interest-free loan to use for a down payment on their first home in Saskatchewan, which will partner nicely with the graduate retention program. We encourage them to continue to live in this province, not leave for greener pastures somewhere else. They bring new ideas, skills, energy to our communities, businesses, and help to make the province stronger. These programs are great for helping graduates get on their feet by supporting them to build their homes amongst the communities throughout Saskatchewan.

[20:30]

Mr. Speaker, investing and supporting our future is a strong commitment. The government is committed to offering strong support for students, offering them programs to help them save and pay for education: 32.5 million Student Aid Fund providing student grants, loans, and bursaries; 14.3 million for scholarships; 6.5 million for Saskatchewan advantage grant education savings. This continues to keep Saskatchewan strong, investing in students' successes instead of the youth leaving and building up different provinces. The NDP wasn't there to help the people when times were tough.

Mr. Speaker, we never give up on our people. The budget keeps Saskatchewan strong by investing in people, ensuring support for families, children, students, working people, and those that are vulnerable. We do not give up even when the times are tough.

Since 2007 when the Saskatchewan Party was first elected, Saskatchewan has had the second best job creation record in Canada, whereas from 2000 to 2007 under the NDP, Saskatchewan had the worst job creation record in Canada. Mr. Speaker, this shows we are a strong business people. We come here knowing, we come here . . . We know how to make and manage a budget. We are a government that works with communities and partners to help them, support them with their growth.

This isn't the first time we've had tough times and it won't be the last. It is important to know how to manage it and work together, is how we'll make it work. Working together will make . . .

The Government of Saskatchewan is delivering on its highways 2020 plan, delivering a 7 million surge in funding for highways repairs, maintenance over the next three years. 30 million of this total will be invested this year to repair more than 400 kilometres of highways. Work will include gravel improvements, dust treatments, repaving, rut filling, and pothole fixing.

Since 2008 the government has invested 6.3 billion in transportation infrastructure, improving more than 11,000 kilometres of Saskatchewan roads. Investing in infrastructure builds Saskatchewan's strength and will show a return now and into the future. It establishes structured framework to help the province's economy. The investments support construction jobs when other sectors are feeling the downturn. This needed investment improves safety on roads and expands and improves the transportation system vitally important in our export-driven province.

Investing in building new schools with creating better learning places for children attending elementary and secondary education and post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, capital investments helps in the delivery of quality health care and long-term care by building hospitals and facilities suited for those vital needs. The four-year plan recognizes the importance of maintaining the health care facility to keep Saskatchewan strong. The four-year plan increases maintenance and equipment funding, recognizing the importance of ensuring that adequate support exists to ensure the Saskatchewan health system continues to meet the needs of its people.

Regional authorities are reducing administration expenses by 7.5 million a year, redirecting savings to improve seniors' care by hiring more registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and continuing care aids in long-term care facilities.

The last time the NDP controlled our health care, they closed 52 hospitals, eliminated 1,200 long-term care beds, and we had the longest surgical wait times in Canada. Since Premier Wall was elected in 2007, we have gone from having the longest waits for surgery in Canada to the shortest. We have built new hospitals. We are building the first Saskatchewan child's hospital. We're adding 15 new long-term care facilities, and we're hiring 650 new doctors and 3,000 new nurses.

The government's decision was to keep mill rates consistent for

now. The NDP raised the taxes 21 times in 16 years. Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party has delivered record income tax and education property tax cuts for everyone in Saskatchewan and has kept taxes low. Since the EPT [education property tax] reformed in 2009, mill rates have only been lowered and have not been adjusted for inflation, while enrolments, teachers' salaries, and school operational costs have increased. The share of operating funding from the EPT is currently 36 per cent, lower than the long-standing goal of 40 per cent.

Balance is sought to ensure the sustainability of the programs and services Saskatchewan people value and need today and into the future. There are circumstances when global events, large drops in revenue, or increased expenses due to natural disasters or large crop failures make it more prudent to run a manageable deficit rather than implement severe cuts to programs and services to increase the cost burden on citizens. This year is such a time. The government remains committed to returning to a budget, a balanced budget in 2017 and '18. We will help Saskatchewan through a difficult year before the economic recovery next year by keeping taxes low and controlling operational spending.

We will invest in schools, hospitals, infrastructure such as highways. Mr. Speaker, we have been committed from the start in building an industry in agriculture that is strong and viable. The budget has continued to support the ranchers and farmers. We have put in effect programming and strategic investment.

The Ministry of Agriculture budget from 2016-17 will increase by 7.5 per cent for a total of 389.8 million. This includes 254.6 million to fully fund business risk management programs and 14.6 million to increase from the previous year.

The agriculture industry accounts for more than 50,000 jobs across the province and continues to grow. Feeding our expanding population is one of the most important issues of our time. Saskatchewan agriculture industry can be a leader in finding solutions and help meet the growing demand for food.

The farmers and ranchers lead an industry that has tripled the yield of food production in the past century while using fewer inputs. A farmer in the 1900s produced enough food to feed 10 people but today's average farms feed more than 120. Advancements in science and technology are helping farmers and ranchers become experts in producing more food with less. An example is production of crops using low- or no-till systems that conserve moisture and prevent soil erosion.

Saskatchewan is a major contributor to the world-class crop research and develops efforts that provide innovative ways to increase production. Plant breeding programs like those at the Crop Development Centre in Saskatoon are creating improved crop varieties that boost plant health and yield.

Saskatchewan's agriculture industry is viable and diversified. In Saskatchewan we sit in the driver's seat of one of the most promising sectors in the world's economy — the food industry. Agriculture, the supply source for food for the industry, is often called the sector of the future, satisfying the rising demands, pushing our industry to come up with new ways to increase production. Meanwhile economics, environment considerations

force farmers to find ways to produce more with less — less land, less water, fewer inputs, and less soil disturbance. This creates a significant challenge, one that the industry is overcoming through determination and innovation, and one that makes agriculture a promising career for our youth. We recognize agriculture's role as a resilient and stable contributor to Saskatchewan's economy and will continue to offer the programs and services producers need to keep their operations and the entire agriculture industry strong.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's 2016-17 budget will keep Saskatchewan strong, investing in infrastructure in our people while controlling operational spending. The 2016-17 budget will keep Saskatchewan strong — no tax increases, controlling spending, investing in people, investing in infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, I support the new budget and do not support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin with my responses to the budget speech, I would like to express a few words of appreciation and give some thank yous to some very important and valuable people who were and have been very instrumental in allowing me to humbly serve as their representative for the Lloydminster constituency and the people of this province and this legislature.

First and foremost, I want to thank my family: my husband, Kim, and my children: Nevada, Casey, Chester, Riley, Fraser, Percy, Duke, and Ace who helped with my campaign and have always supported and encouraged me to go for it. I love you dearly.

To my campaign team . . . I know many of you have already stated how awesome your campaign teams were, but I can tell you mine was much more than awesome. They were outstanding. Thank you to my campaign manager, Tracy Patterson, and her husband, Rob, and sons Brodie and Bryce who gave many hours to ensure every little detail was handled and handled well. And I'm happy to say Tracy has returned to once again be my efficient, helpful, and wonderful constituency assistant.

Thank you to my office managers and tech ladies, Carol Dayman and Kiran Naqvi, for their hard work and daily commitment. Thank you to my sign people, particularly Warren Callfas, Steven McKenzie, Wade and Edith Blythe, Surjheel Butt, and the Amydiyahh Muslim community, Jon in the Filipino community. Thank you to my daily phoners: Zuhy Sayeed, Rae Douglas, and Rosemarie Falk. Thank you to some very committed door knockers: Kathy Bloch Hansen, Anil Sharma, Des McMillan, Edna Mangla, Antonnya Otteson, and Adam Gareau who I'm sure were in withdrawal for a while after the election when we stopped.

I must tell you that I had some high school students who came out to help as well during the campaign. But Adam Gareau, a grade 10 student, in particular stands out. His interest in politics, his knowledge of politics and history lessons, along with his outgoing personality made it enjoyable to work with such a fine young fellow. I know our future is in good hands.

He even travelled with me to door knock in the small communities in our northern part of the constituency on a Saturday, and didn't mind spending the whole day watching while I judged 4-H speeches. He spent time listening to and entertaining seniors at the hall and then door knocked through the town until dark. An amazing young man.

There were so many folks, too many to list, whose support and help throughout the campaign contributed to the strong efforts of getting me elected. Thank you to all of you. I say thank you to all the constituents who rallied behind me and gave me such strong support. I received the largest majority in this province since 1938. I am humbled and honoured to serve you, and will always give you my respect, time, and commitment to do the best job I can as a member of this Assembly.

I also want to congratulate all those members who have earned the honour of being a representative in this Assembly today, as well as thanking all those candidates who chose to put their names forward for public office.

I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election as Speaker of this Assembly, and to the member from Last Mountain-Touchwood on his election as Deputy Speaker, both very important roles to play in the governing of this House and province. A most grateful and appreciative thank you also goes to our Finance minister, the deputy Finance minister, my fellow treasury board members, and the hard-working Finance staff who put in many hours reviewing and working on budget finalization.

Before I offer some comments on the budget, Mr. Speaker, I also want to share a brief story that needs to be told and documented in the minutes of this legislature, a story about someone who wasn't elected as a member of this legislature but played an important role behind the scenes over 80 years ago. And today is that day that I'm about to tell this important and special story.

This will also be meaningful to you, Mr. Speaker, as this person is a Saskatoon Eastview constituent of yours, and I know you had the opportunity to meet him during your campaign. Besides my husband, Kim, who was the MLA representing your constituency of Saskatoon Eastview, Mr. Speaker, from 1982 to '86, this constituent I'm going to speak about served the Hon. Charlie Agar who was the Speaker of the House many years ago.

[20:45]

As a very young man of 15 years old, Mr. Anton Lloyd Beck had to drop out of school and go to work to help support his mother and younger sister. His two older brothers had already left school and gone to work to do the same. He was born at South Allan, Saskatchewan on August 6th, 1920 and, as an infant, his parents took him and his brothers to homestead at Spiritwood, Saskatchewan. His father died when he was three in a farming accident, and his mother died shortly after he left at 15 to go to work.

Tony Beck, as he is more commonly called, soon found work at the farm of Charlie Agar, run then by his son who grew crops, had a 300-pig operation, 50 head of cattle, and 1,800 laying

chickens from which he supplied eggs to the co-op stores. Tony helped in the fields, tended to the livestock during the day, and helped candle eggs, a lot of eggs, in the cellar each evening for \$35 a month. It was hard work, long days, but that was a lot of money in those days and considered a good-paying job.

Charlie Agar Senior was initially elected as a member of this legislature in 1921, representing Saskatoon County. In 1939, when Charlie Agar Senior was elected for the sixth time as a Liberal representative in the constituency of Hanley, he became the Speaker of this House. Mr. Agar had Parkinson's disease and was unable to drive anymore.

In 1937 while working on his farm just south of Saskatoon, he met Tony Beck, a young 17-year-old who had been working for the neighbour on and off. Mr. Agar asked Tony if he could drive a tractor and when Tony responded yes, he hired him as his personal driver to take both him and an opposition member, the Hon. Rod Kennedy, back and forth to Regina during session. A four and a half hour trip one way, no paved road, just gravel, but Tony was a 17-year-old young man behind the wheel of a brand new, beautiful, tan coloured 1938 Dodge car. He was so proud and excited to take on such an important role. He never ever took a driving test, was handed a licence, a chauffeur hat and suit by the Speaker of the House, and was paid \$7.50 a month to drive them back and forth to Regina.

They would arrive at the Hotel Sask in Regina, which was a long ways from the legislature then. He shared a hotel room with the Speaker and was handed \$5 at the beginning of each three-day stay during the week in Regina and told to enjoy himself. Tony regularly sat in the Speaker's gallery listening and learning or would walk to the Capitol Theatre to watch movies and eat popcorn.

Tony remarked to me that during those three years he drove those two gentlemen, he never once heard Mr. Agar or Mr. Kennedy talk politics on the drive there and back; only farming, the weather, family, and anything else but politics. He learned a lot as a young man.

In 1939 when young men were joining the forces for the war, the Speaker of the House, Mr. Charlie Agar, offered to provide Tony with a paper saying he did not have to join the conscription but remain as his employee. Tony chose to join the RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] and flew Sunderlands and Spitfires as a flight engineer. Tony chose to swap his chauffeur's uniform for an air force uniform, and just like the veteran who was introduced in the House yesterday, Tony proudly served this country so all of us could stand here today and continue to speak freely about the economics and future of our province. Tony did six tours of duty, was shot down over South Wales a couple of times, earned medals of valour and honour, and was one of the fortunate ones to return home after fighting in the Second World War.

Upon returning to Saskatchewan, he took over his uncle's farm near Blucher, Saskatchewan, married a young schoolteacher by the name of Brigitta Young, where they grew crops, had a mixed farm, and raised 11 children together, one of those children, Mr. Speaker, being myself. My dad, Anton Lloyd Beck, Tony, will be 96 years old this August. And while sitting next to his bed this week at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon

after he recently suffered a heart attack, he can still tell this story like it was yesterday. Thank you, Dad, for being the best dad in the world. I love you.

Now to turn to the budget, Mr. Speaker. Budgets are challenging even in the best of times. Decisions always have to be made around where one needs to or can spend and where and when savings can be found. Incoming revenues aren't always consistent, and create challenges. Every household needs to make budget decisions and prioritize spending that keep it strong, well maintained, sustainable, the family working together, and keeps everyone in the household reasonably happy — tough to do but not impossible.

We can look at this province as our household. Our 2016-17 budget shows challenges, but its design — in controlling operational spending, not raising taxes or introducing any new taxes, investing in important and needed infrastructure to maintain and create opportunity for growth and investment, and ensuring the people, our provincial family, that we have a plan to get back to balance as revenues improve — has been strongly supported by the people of this province. Our modest deficit pales in comparison to other provincial deficits in this country.

We could have done what the opposition members did in the past and what gets some households in financial straits: rack up the big orange credit card, tax the heck out of everyone over and over again to put money in the kitty, shut down certain parts of the household that we don't want to repair or invest in anymore, cut activities and programs, and watch the kids go elsewhere to find jobs and careers. Shameful, but that's what the opposition members did when the economy got tough.

I believe and I know the Saskatchewan Party's government budget will keep Saskatchewan strong through these challenging economic times. Many of the members of this House have already laid out many facts and figures of investment and opportunities given to and put into the people and communities of this province over the past nine years. The unprecedented population growth, job creation record, strong investments in hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities, integrated health facilities, highways, bridges, bypasses, agriculture programs, social assistance programs, and much more have given this government the proven track record of being receptive to the needs of this province. Accountable, fiscally responsible, transparent, open to new ideas, willing to work with businesses and organizations, willing to listen and change what we are doing when necessary, and supporting those most vulnerable in our population — all because we truly do care — the people of Saskatchewan see and know this and that is why there are 51 of us on this side.

In my constituency of Lloydminster and in a biprovincial city, it's always challenging to work with two different governments. But, Mr. Speaker, in this recent election the voters had already seen what an NDP government can do in a short period of time to damage and devastate the economy of a province like Alberta. Yes, falling oil prices have played a role in changing the landscape of an oil-dependent province. But when an NDP government contributes to the tax burden and does not support pipelines and instead spends millions of taxpayers dollars on environmental studies, reviews, and reports, and throws caution to the wind in the form of billions of dollars of debt with no

plan to bring things back to balance, it's easy to understand why our Premier and province with this budget and plan to return to balance in 2017-18 are the envy of this country.

Because our opposition members support the Leap Manifesto, I am positive it wouldn't take them long to do harm and damage to the economy of this province and turn back the clock to the days of tax hikes, closing hospitals, schools, long-term care facilities, losing doctors and nurses, losing investment in businesses, and watching our young people walk out of this province to find careers and work elsewhere.

Lloydminster and the surrounding area are hurting because of the slump in oil prices: job losses, stores and restaurants closing down. Oil and truck hauling companies have laid off hundreds of employees, and families have had to move elsewhere to find work. This is not easy to watch and see in a city with a young population of rising entrepreneurs and skilled labourers. It is troubling that today there are some in this country who, given the opportunity, would shut down major parts of Saskatchewan's economy and put thousands of hard-working Saskatchewan people out of work, all in the name of some misguided dogma that has no basis in reality. Thank heavens the people of this province have more common sense than they do. Our government will take every occasion to stand up for this province, to defend vital sectors, and to stand up for every one of those jobs.

Mr. Speaker, since 2007 we have given \$6 billion in tax reductions which have stayed in the pockets and homes of families, individuals, homeowners, businesses, and farmers, as compared to the NDP who raised taxes 21 times during 16 years, including raising the PST four times and the gas tax twice.

Because of those tax reductions, we have seen record job and population growth in this province. In the last seven years, Saskatchewan has had the lowest unemployment rate in Canada and the second strongest job creation record among the provinces, behind only Alberta.

The number of people working in Saskatchewan grew by over 68,000. Under the NDP, Saskatchewan had the worst job creation record in Canada, behind every other province. We have grown by over 85,000 people, whereas under the NDP from 1991 to 2007, 56,000 more people moved out of Saskatchewan than moved in.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a priority of this government to make economic decisions, tough as they may be at times, that truly show we are investing back into the people of . . . [inaudible] . . . Saskatchewan. Revenue sharing in the city of Lloydminster alone has gone from over 700,000 in 2007 to over 2.1 million in this budget. That's a 199 per cent increase in nine years, Mr. Speaker. All of the RMs have expressed their appreciation for this government's commitment to the 1 per cent predictable revenue sharing from the PST. They never want to go back to the time of a guessing game, whether they were getting anything under the NDP, up and down mill rates, and tax revolt by property owners.

School divisions in my riding have seen significant increased operating funding since 2007: year-over-year operating

increases, two new schools with 72 child care spaces in each, and a new \$6 million gym in the community of Hillmond. Total pre-K to 12 capital allocated to my constituency since 2007, Mr. Speaker, has been \$65.2 million.

Prairie North Health Region has had a 71 per cent increase in operating funding since 2007, with a 3.8 per cent year-over-year increase totalling 220.2 million in operating funding.

Mine is just one health region where investment has been increasingly made year over year since 2007. This year, even with a \$1 billion loss in resource revenues due to low oil and potash prices, our government is choosing not to close hospitals, long-term care facilities, shut down hospital beds as they did, as the NDP did in the past. But instead we have chosen to continue investing in our health care system to the tune of \$5.3 billion.

Since November 2007 my community and constituency has received more than \$3.1 million to develop 31 rental and homeowner units and repair four homes in Lloydminster along with special housing units for community members with intellectual disabilities. Total investments in highways in my constituency was \$13.1 million last year, and in this budget, with a promise of additional 30 million surge in highway repair maintenance, my constituency will receive more than 4.1 million of that 30 million.

Constituency of Lloydminster has a large rural agricultural component to it as well and continued investment in this industry supports our farmers and ranchers to ensure the heart and soul of this province, from the time that the first settlers and Barr colonists who arrived in Lloydminster, continues to remain a strong, viable, and sustainable source for our province. All these investments show that this government's consistent care, concern, and addressing of the needs of the people of Saskatchewan is a priority.

[21:00]

Transformational change was noted in the budget speech, Mr. Speaker, and as a member of the treasury board I found it interesting to see and hear from different ministries about the numerous programs and services that as a government we chose to fund and choose to fund and provide to the people of this province. But I couldn't help wondering sometimes, and it is our role to do so, if some of the programs no longer provided an effective, efficient service, if programs were achieving their desired outcome, if some services were being duplicated, or if a program or service could be provided in a more efficient and effective way or by someone else or some other business or organization — all questions that over the next few years will be important to ensuring that we do the right job in the right way for the right reasons for all the people of Saskatchewan and with the right amount of funding.

The transformational change will look at both sides of the ledger, revenues and expenses, and ask all those same important questions while working with our partners and stakeholders to find the answers. Going forward we need to have sustainable, positive outcomes.

This government has made some tough decisions, Mr. Speaker,

but we never, never want to go back to the way it was under the NDP and risk becoming a have-not province again. I want a strong, positive, and sustainable future for my grandchildren, and that's why I support this government's 2016-17 budget put forth by our Finance minister and will not be supporting the opposition's amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Opposition House Leader.

An Hon. Member: — Hear, hear!

Mr. McCall: — Whoa. That supplied most of my own hear-hearing there, Mr. Speaker. But we'll give it a whirl.

It's good to join the debate tonight, and certainly the budget is always one of the centrepieces of a government's agenda, its intent in terms of meeting the needs and hopes and dreams of the people of Saskatchewan.

And there's nothing quite like a budget after an election, Mr. Speaker, in terms of where that situates the province and the party that was elected for government around the campaign that had just been undertaken, and then the way that the agenda is actually folding out and whether that does or does not meet up with the agenda that has been put forward by the government of the day when they go to the polls.

It was with great interest, Mr. Speaker, that it wasn't, I think . . . maybe not days, but certainly not more than weeks after the election in which the government members won quite handily, and certainly there's no disputing that, Mr. Speaker.

But they won on a platform of keeping Saskatchewan strong. And there was a fairly sparse list of commitments that was proffered to the people of Saskatchewan. The spartan quality of it was heralded as a virtue by the Premier, Mr. Speaker. And you know, it's fair enough. That's what the people have decided best addressed their needs, best met their hopes and dreams. And so we had an election where 51 Sask Party MLAs were returned, 10 on the NDP official opposition side.

And I guess the thing that's interesting about the way that the campaign unrolled, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a number of things where they were entirely absent from the campaign. And if you subscribe to the old-fashioned notion that a campaign is a time when, you know, each party puts out their platform, they put out their plans, they put out their ideas, the people weigh them, say them, and make their decision as to what best meets their needs . . . you know, that's usually how democracy goes.

There are a lot of student groups that come through this Assembly, and that's generally one of the things that we like to talk about with the students in terms of there's a clash of ideas, or there are competing platforms that are put forward. People make an informed decision as to, you know, combining the record, judging the leadership qualities of each of the parties, and their platforms.

And certainly I've been around here long enough, Mr. Speaker, where I can remember the 2007 election with the, you know, Ready for Growth theme that was put forward by the members opposite. And certainly there was a list of promises that attached to that campaign, and I can certainly recall the delight

with which the Premier would talk about the way that it was a promise made and a promise kept.

Now in terms of the campaign, Mr. Speaker, there are things that are done in terms of commission and there are things that are done in terms of omission. And in terms of things that were omitted from this campaign, Mr. Speaker, certainly transformational change was not part of the campaign discussion.

There wasn't a talk about, you know, we're going to, you know, not weeks after the election we're going to start talking about how yes, the deficit is bigger; yes, the shortfalls in terms of revenue are larger, and as a consequence we're going to have to make some very tough decisions at this budget with worse to come. I don't know what campaign that was part of, Mr. Speaker, but it certainly didn't play on the doorsteps in Regina Elphinstone-Centre, and it certainly didn't play in the different debates that I had the privilege of participating in, and it didn't play in terms of the broader public discussion that was undertaken. It was very much about keep Saskatchewan strong, you know, steady hand on the tiller.

The NDP put forward our platform in terms of ideas that we thought responded to the hopes and needs of the people of Saskatchewan as we understood them and as we had heard from the people of Saskatchewan. And again there were judgments made on the relative qualities of those platforms, and the Sask Party was returned with 51 seats compared to our 10.

The problem with that, Mr. Speaker, is that in terms of the proposition that was put to the people of Saskatchewan upon which that majority has been built, is the fact that you've got transformational change coming forward. You've got a financial picture that is in much worse condition than was let on to in the campaign. And you've got a number of decisions that have been made in this budget — with more to come surely in budgets in the near future — that again I don't think people can be faulted for looking at different decisions that have been made in this budget and different decisions that are foreshadowed in budgets to come by saying that, you know, when it came to the campaign, I didn't vote for that. That was not part of the deal. And for the government to now say that everything is on the table, you know, that wasn't part of the campaign discussion.

In terms of transformational change where you have the Minister of Finance, the former minister of Advanced Education, talking about how maybe we could be merging different departments between our university, maybe we should be taking a run at the reserve funds at the University of Saskatchewan to cite, you know, two examples, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't part of conversation. And I know that because I participated in a debate with the Minister of Advanced Education on campus at the University of Regina.

And it would have been very interesting, had that been part of the conversation. Because in terms of the post-secondary education sector, what we hear time and again from the sector is that they want a partner that they can count on in terms of doing this very critical work of adding to the innovative nature of our economy, to making our economy more productive, to skilling up people in Saskatchewan to go on to the better jobs, and to make our economy go and make our society more profitable,

Mr. Speaker. So that wasn't part of the campaign.

But here we are now with this, you know . . . Transformational change is upon us and it's been pushed out to the post-secondary sector. Will we have one big board for all of the regional colleges? How will that work for the Saskatchewan Polytechnic? How will it work for the offerings on Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies or Gabriel Dumont? There's a fair amount of concern and question that's out there in the sector, Mr. Speaker, again, against the backdrop of a financial situation that is worse than was let on, that is against the situation where different of these things have been looked at in the past, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, we're not here by accident in terms of way that the post-secondary education sector is deployed. But it would have been good to have had that discussion in the campaign, again, if you subscribe to the notion that you should be going to the people with your plans and, you know, be forward about your promises, which again was a virtue or was trumpeted as a virtue by earlier iterations of this government, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of what happens around support for students, there was talk about the graduate retention program and enabling some of that to apply against mortgage. You know, fair enough. That was campaigned on. They've got a mandate for that. On they go. But in terms of the way that decisions that this government is going to be making on the other side of the coin, in terms of the cost of admission to the post-secondary education institutions, you can almost bet that, sure as the sun comes up in the east, that tuition is going to go up, that costs are going to go up for students, and that the institutions themselves are going to be forced into some kind of transformational change, what-do-you-want-to-dispense-with conversation. Again, not part of the campaign, Mr. Speaker.

One thing that was part of the campaign was, I remember well, a nice ad from the Premier where he's talking concernedly about his college roommate and, you know, this would have been about '87 when that college roommate of his that had graduated, and where was he going to go? Well, he went to Alberta, Mr. Speaker. And certainly we've heard a lot in the talking points from members opposite about the gifts of luggage that are no longer bought for the grade 12 grads, and on and on, and it's something to hear the recitation, Mr. Speaker. But repetition doesn't lend itself to actual verification in this case. Because you've got the record which is in . . . I have many great constituents, and again I've talked about them at some length in the Throne Speech debate, Mr. Speaker, so we're getting right to the meat of the matter here. But I turn to Trish Elliott who's a journalism professor at the University of Regina, who'd written a great letter in to the *Leader-Post* October 9, 2015. And part of that is:

Saskatchewan's largest annual population loss occurred under a Progressive Conservative government — 19,928 people leaving the province in 1989-1990. The largest loss over a five-year period was 1987 to 1992 — 69,721, with all but one of those years under the PCs, who were of course turfed in 1991.

And again, Mr. Speaker, I raise that by way of . . . You know, you throw stones, you'd be here all day, Mr. Speaker, in terms

of trying to correct the record in the way that these people have put forward talking points that don't relate to the historical record. But that's the record, Mr. Speaker. The worst population loss that this province ever encountered was under the then Progressive Conservative Grant Devine government.

And the Premier, in terms of the campaign and this ad that was, my roommate's going to leave to Alberta and, you know, never again. You know, what was the Premier's response at that time, Mr. Speaker? It was to go work for the government that was presiding over that very greatest period of population loss in the history of Saskatchewan. And you know, that doesn't track with the talking points over there, and it doesn't track with the Premier's ad in the way that the revisionist history that has been constructed by these members. But that's the record, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of, again, how this government came to the people of Saskatchewan, put forward, you know, keep Saskatchewan strong is the vision. And then after the election it was, oh by the way, we're going to get into transformational change and, you know, we've got a bunch of cuts that we have to make and on. And, oh also, vision 2020, the overall debt of this province is going to go up to a level that it hasn't been seen at since, yes, the bad old days of the Grant Devine government.

[21:15]

And I guess the interesting thing about that — and again, I'm talking about the budget speech — one of the things that was interesting to see with the budget speech, Mr. Speaker, was the appearance of Lorne Hepworth here at the budget to take a good hard look at his former employee and pupil, the now Minister of Finance, the member from Northeast here in Regina. And it was very interesting to see, Mr. Speaker. And apparently we've struck a nerve because apparently this is all part of the rolling out platform by which some day soon, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure we're going to see Grant Devine himself come to this Assembly to preside and to look on fondly over the way that the forbearers have carried the project forward.

And again, Mr. Speaker, these are folks that want to talk about decisions that were taken in the '90s, in terms of the wrenching choices that had to be made because of what had happened to our population, what had happened to our economy, and what had happened to our society, Mr. Speaker. And in terms of the record overall, you don't hear that in terms of the remarks from members opposite. You hear the talking point parade.

To the contents of the budget itself, Mr. Speaker. You spend \$14-plus billion — guess what? — some good things are going to happen in that. And certainly there are some things in particular that I am glad to see happening. I'm glad to see the increased dollars going to the Cancer Agency. I'm glad to see that vital infrastructure projects like the Scott Collegiate Mâdawêyatîtan together now centre are going forward. I'm glad to see Sacred Heart proceeding, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see that in terms of, you know . . . And there are some things that remain to be seen in terms of this budget. I'm glad to see that some of those vital projects that, you know, have been a long time coming, Mr. Speaker, and promised multiple times by the government opposite. I'm glad to see them arriving.

But again it's balanced off against things like, you know, I think about the seniors that I talked to in the campaign who talked about the struggle they have with the cost of living and the way that again they didn't talk about the increase to the copay for seniors' drug plan in this campaign, but sure enough here it is on budget day. We didn't see any action in terms of affordable housing for seniors, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen action on the plans to privatize the 40 liquor stores, and again that was something that was campaigned on, but what wasn't campaigned on was taking the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority out of the Crown protection Act altogether.

In terms of deficit projections from the campaign to now — up. In terms of debt projections from the campaign to now — up. We didn't hear about the SaskPower rate increase, the double-barrelled SaskPower rate increase, that again these members brought forward you know mere days, weeks after the campaign.

We didn't hear anything in the campaign about the tightening economic circumstances that again are having a devastating impact on our labour force. And there are some good things under the labour market section of the Ministry of the Economy's budget, but there were also some things that have been flatlined and some things that have moved backwards, Mr. Speaker.

And this is against a backdrop of a situation where we've lost 9,400 jobs last April over this and where we'll be . . . or last May over this. And we'll be looking on with great interest to see what happens on the release of labour market statistics this coming Friday. But one thing about last month's statistics, Mr. Speaker, is that fully one in four off-reserve First Nations people in the province of Saskatchewan are unemployed. That's a disaster. That's a disaster, and you don't hear the government ringing the alarm in terms of the actions that they should be taking to address.

In terms of crime, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what's happening in our inner cities, the crime rate is going up. We see more gang activity than we have in the past. And in the face of that we see the community justice initiatives that play a very important role in taking those things on, we see them being cut back. We see no action on the mental health and poverty reduction strategies, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Not true.

Mr. McCall: — Well in terms of full implementation or you know, actual moving of the strategies forward, you know it's . . . Okay. To correct myself, Mr. Speaker, you see paltry action in terms of the way that this government has moved forward on that.

In terms of foster care, Mr. Speaker, and again I know this from folks that I have the privilege of representing, we don't see the kind of action that should be part of the situation, in a situation where foster families are leaving the system in alarming numbers, Mr. Speaker, and have been for the past number of years.

In terms of the bypass that doesn't bypass the city of Regina, you know, on that project goes, and the money keeps getting shovelled into that. And you know, the point is not about . . . you know, there's been some interesting things said about the Saskatchewan jobs that are part of it, Mr. Speaker, and I guess that's the point. That's the point, Mr. Speaker. The point is we've got Saskatchewan companies and workers that can do that work here. And how we have to fold that into a P3 [public-private partnership] where we send the money to France, Mr. Speaker, instead of making sure that that benefit is maximized for the people of Saskatchewan, you know, surpasses understanding.

And we'll see what the big photo op is tomorrow with the minister. Maybe she'll wear a hard hat. Maybe she'll get behind the wheel or something. We'll see how that goes. But one thing's for sure, Mr. Speaker, they won't be doing the photo op where they fill the dump truck full of money and then drive it out of the province headed for France.

In terms of the different critic responsibilities that I've been tasked with, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. I have the privilege of being the critic for SaskTel. And again even there, Mr. Speaker, where something that should be a fairly reasonable proposition in terms of evaluating the changing landscape in terms of the Bell Canada's purchase of MTS [Manitoba Telephone System], the response after the election from the minister is to say, we're going to respect the Crown protection Act. And what happens then when it gets in the hands of the Premier it's, well you know, maybe we'll have a referendum or something like that, something that bears a lot more resemblance to the Sask Party circa 2002 or the Progressive Conservatives in 1998, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of parks and culture and sport again, Mr. Speaker, there are some great things going on throughout the province. This weekend, Mr. Speaker, for example on the amateur sports side, Water Polo Canada is going to be meeting in Regina, and part of that is going to be celebrating the success of the Armada women having won yet another national championship, Mr. Speaker, and two other Armada teams having finished second, achieving silver. Their home pool, of course, is the Lawson Aquatic Centre in Regina Elphinstone-Centre. We're very proud of the work that they do and the accomplishment they achieve.

And you telescope out from that in terms of the way that amateur sports and sport in general, you know, certainly the province was very excited about the last-minute victory of the Rush in Saskatoon and the way that the exciting sport of lacrosse has been brought . . . And there are a great number of examples that can be brought to bear, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of culture, again I'm glad to see that at least they haven't cut the budgets for Creative Saskatchewan or for the Saskatchewan Arts Board. But again, flatline is one way to characterize it, Mr. Speaker, versus the way that we heard from the minister earlier.

And I guess the one thing that's of particular interest, Mr. Speaker, is the way that that minister came forward to talk about the cuts to urban parks. And again, Mr. Speaker, in terms of, you know, the member from Stonebridge earlier was quoting

Huey Lewis and the News. It sort of makes me think of the Hall and Oates song in terms of "I Can't Go For That," except it's more like, I didn't vote for that.

And when it comes to the five urban parks, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the way that that . . . You've got Wakamow in Moose Jaw. You've got Chinook Parkway in Swift Current. You've got Pehonan in P.A. You've got River Valley in the Battlefords. You've got Tatagwa in Weyburn. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? People didn't hear about that in the election. And the president of the association for those parks, councillor Nancy Styles, someone from Weyburn who the minister's obviously familiar with, said that she would have liked to have heard about that before the election. And you know, again, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the message of keep Saskatchewan strong in the campaign, and then when it comes to governing, something else entirely.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it would have been good if they had campaigned in all those communities as, you know, how that was going to be something that should be undertaken. It would have been great to see how that played in P.A. [Prince Albert], Mr. Speaker. It would have been very interesting in the Battlefords, in Weyburn, and Swift Current.

And it certainly would have been interesting to see how that played in Moose Jaw Wakamow, Mr. Speaker. In Moose Jaw Wakamow, where yesterday in the budget speech debate, Mr. Speaker, you didn't hear a darn thing about that from the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow. Not a thing. Not a thing from that member. And I guess it's surprising on a number of levels, Mr. Speaker, but that's what that constituency is named after, Mr. Speaker. You'd think that that would have rated a mention or some kind of attempt at explanation. But not so, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of what's going to come in the days ahead around Wascana Centre and Meewasin, again we'll be watching with a dedicated degree of interest. And again, if they want to do away with the provincial support for these programs, they should have the decency to do it during campaign time. They shouldn't come along mere days and weeks later with the cuts, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I'd like to see them come forward in terms of, I know how important the Wascana Centre Authority is to here, is to the city of Regina. It would have been interesting to see if the member from Coronation Park, the minister responsible for the cuts to the urban parks, if he'd have been as laissez-faire, if he'd been as blasé about it in terms of the campaign as he was on budget day where he was like, well you know, tough decisions had to be made. It would have been good to see how the people weighed that proposition, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of the other responsibilities that I've been entrusted with, Mr. Speaker, there's not enough time in this particular debate to go on in terms of the ways that I would like to, but certainly we'll be getting to some of these things in estimates. But we'll be interested to see how the Public Service Commission is impacted by transformational change, having been hit with a 15 per cent reduction in years previous by these members, again something that wasn't campaigned on.

We'll be interested to see how that impacts Central Services, Mr. Speaker, where today in one of the members opposite's speeches, the member from Stonebridge, I believe she was talking about how they'd like to see less being spent on consultants and on contracting out. I could hardly believe my ears, Mr. Speaker, but you know, I think that's a great idea. I think we've heard that idea from the Provincial Auditor, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the way that Central Services does their work. So we'll see if that works its way into the transformational change file.

In terms of the Sask resource council, Tourism Saskatchewan, Innovation Saskatchewan, these are vital institutions that are doing important work, and we look forward to seeing how the flat line that has been given to them, in most cases, how that works out.

Just one last thing on advanced education, Mr. Speaker, in terms of, you know, what are the plans of this government as regards our university campuses, as regards the capital needs of those institutions. How is that going to play out? And we'll see again the institutions doing the best to make their projects go forward. But as related to the academic health sciences centre, Mr. Speaker, that again, this was put off by the government. You know, it would have been good to know that during the campaign.

[21:30]

It would have been good to know that on the employment front, Mr. Speaker, that the deal that was offered up for SkipTheDishes would be there for other segments of the economy, Mr. Speaker, or even other segments of the information technology sector. Or even that, you know, having made a decision like that, the error of the ways around the approach taken to the film industry would have been realized, Mr. Speaker, and the way that at the time the Premier was decrying picking winners and losers. And you know, the arguments ran pretty thick and fast at that time, Mr. Speaker, but you didn't hear that around the \$3 million put up for SkipTheDishes. You heard, you know, keep it moving and, by the way, there will be nothing like this for anyone else in the budget to come.

In terms of First Nations and Métis relations, again, Mr. Speaker, to close off here, we have a huge moment of opportunity in front of us as a province. In the wake of the final report and 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this should be a moment of opportunity for the province to really go forward, to come together with indigenous people in the province of Saskatchewan and say that we've got to do better for all the people of Saskatchewan going forward, that the province of Saskatchewan has a role to play in terms of many of those calls to action. So let us sit down together and put together that plan of implementation so that reconciliation does not pass us by, that this moment of opportunity doesn't go to waste and with it the waste in human potential and the success of the province along with it. But you didn't hear about that in the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker. You didn't hear about it in the budget. And again it's a waste of opportunity that we only fail ourselves in terms of not taking that action, Mr. Speaker.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken long enough. Certainly I'll have more questions as these different budgets move into estimates. But for those and many other reasons, I'll be supporting the amendment and I will not be supporting the budget.

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

Mr. Olason: — Well thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I begin my budget speech, I'd like to make a couple of thank yous, if I could. Thank you to my new constituency assistant, Maddy Fast.

An Hon. Member: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Olason: — Yes, hear, hear. She helped me prepare this reply that you're going to hear from today, and I think it's pretty good. So I wanted to make sure that I got a thank you in to her.

Mr. Speaker, on April 4th, residents of Saskatchewan had a choice. We could continue to be a have province with a sound record of financial management, AAA credit rating, job growth, reduced surgical wait times, and seniors' support, just to name a few. Or we could go back to being a have-not province under the NDP, relying on federal equalization payments to fund provincial government services, increasing taxes, killing jobs, and scaring our population away. Twenty-one times, Mr. Speaker, the NDP raised taxes during their 16 years in government. And, Mr. Speaker, can you believe the NDP government lost nearly 300 million taxpayers' dollars in failed business ventures, many of which weren't even in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on with reasons why the people of Saskatchewan voted with a resounding yes for our leadership just a short two months ago. On April 4th, Saskatchewan spoke, Mr. Speaker. And what they told us is that our party is the party they trust to keep taxes low and the economy steady during the slower times.

According to a recent Conference Board of Canada report, Saskatchewan has among the lowest personal and business tax burdens in Canada. Mr. Speaker, they spoke loud and clear, and we are indeed humbled by their trust. You see, Mr. Speaker, the residents of Saskatoon University, and all of Saskatchewan, chose to keep Saskatchewan strong.

This budget is fiscally responsible. We are keeping taxes low, controlling operational spending while continuing to make important investments in infrastructure and in important government services for the Saskatchewan people.

And, Mr. Speaker, people from other provinces and countries are seeing our success and saying, I want to live there. And guess what? They are. In fact, Mr. Speaker, since our party was elected in 2007, Saskatchewan has grown by over 132,000 people. Saskatchewan is indeed the place to raise your family, work, and retire.

Mr. Speaker, in my address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, I had stated how most residents of Saskatchewan in

their lifetime use medical services one way or the other. My family is no exception. My niece Anna has some extreme health difficulties and has been in and out of hospitals in her short seven years of life. Health care is something that is extremely important to the people of this province. We need to have excellent care for our citizens in order to provide the quality of life we all expect and we all deserve. Sadly this hasn't always been the case in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

It is our government that stands up for those who are in most need in our province. While the NDP talked, we acted. The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency is receiving more than \$167 million in funding in this budget, up 9.8 million from last year or 6.2 per cent. The substantial increase in funding will help pay for the addition of 15 new cancer drugs that were approved last year. Since 2007, funding for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency has increased by nearly 113 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the health budget includes \$500,000 to fulfill the government's campaign commitment to expand its robotic telemedicine to more northern communities. This project allows health care professionals to connect with patients remotely and provide real-time assessment, diagnosis, and patient management.

The budget is also reducing RHA [regional health authority] administration expenses by 7.5 million and reinvesting that funding to front-line staff in our long-term care homes. This equals a 5 per cent reduction in general administration costs to be determined as part of the RHA budget finalization in the coming months.

Capital investments total 71.4 million in 2016-17 including a 25 per cent increase for capital maintenance across the province. Capital funding is also being provided for a power plant upgrade at Saskatoon RUH, Saskatoon Royal University Hospital, electrical renewal projects at Regina's General and Pasqua hospitals, and completion of construction at the Kelvington integrated care facility. Mr. Speaker, we all know that these projects would not have flourished, let alone have gotten off the ground, under the leadership of the NDP. In fact the NDP government closed 52 hospitals under their so-called leadership.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, the University of Saskatchewan will be receiving strong investment from budget 2016-17. Mr. Speaker, our government is investing \$475 million for the University of Saskatchewan and Regina and their affiliated and federated colleges.

The word investment appears 85 times in our budget. Mr. Speaker, the verb "invest" by definition is, and I quote, "to put to use by purchase or expenditures in something offering profitable returns as interest, income, or appreciation in value." And that is exactly what this government believes in.

Our young people are going to be aided through more than \$53 million in direct support: thirty-two and a half million for the Student Aid Fund to provide student grants, bursaries, and loans; 14.3 million for scholarships including the Saskatchewan Advantage Scholarship; and 6.5 million for the Saskatchewan advantage grant for education savings.

Mr. Speaker, this government is investing in our young people, unlike the NDP days where tuition costs increased by 175 per cent when government had no program for reducing Saskatchewan students' tuition. Mr. Speaker, the only investment the residents of Saskatchewan could have been confident in during the NDP days were shares in luggage manufacturing companies.

I'm excited for new first home plan that gives eligible graduates the ability to use up to \$10,000 of their future graduate retention program tax credits as an interest-free loan to use toward the down payment on their first home in our province. There's never been a better time to graduate and to stay in Saskatchewan. Last week I attended two of seven convocations at the University of Saskatchewan and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, we want them to stay here and we want them to be successful here, and we are making that happen.

Included in budget 2016-17, Mr. Speaker, are operating grants to the province's two main universities that eclipse \$475 million. 156 million will be provided to the Sask Polytechnic, SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies], and Gabriel Dumont Institute. 25 million will be provided for Saskatchewan's regional colleges.

Mr. Speaker, our government remains committed to student success, post-secondary, high school, and elementary. That is why we are increasing our investment in education by 7.8 per cent to a total \$2.2 billion. While the NDP shut down schools, 176 to be exact, Mr. Speaker, our government has invested in 40 brand new or replacement schools and 25 major school renovations.

On this side of the floor, we are ensuring students in Saskatchewan are safe and successful in their learning years. This could not be done without the strong leadership and guidance of our teachers. Mr. Speaker, I come from a family of teachers and I can tell you right now, there is no group of more dedicated, selfless, and empathetic people who only want the best for our children and grandchildren. They are tireless and will advocate for their students until their needs are met. And this government will be there with them, helping to ensure another generation of young people stay here and help keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, from 2000 to 2007 under the NDP, the number of teachers teaching here in Saskatchewan schools declined by 400. Thankfully my mother was not one of them. Our government is funding more teachers and student support teachers than ever before. It is our government that has the record of standing up for our teachers and our educational system.

Mr. Speaker, the government's investment in infrastructure for our Education ministry includes 310 million, an increase of 153 million for the 18 joint-use schools being built on nine sites; \$33.4 million, an increase of 6.4 million or 24 per cent for preventative maintenance and renewal; \$4.6 million for emergency building repairs; \$41.9 million for ongoing capital projects including schools in St. Brieux, Langenburg, Gravelbourg, and Martensville; as well as \$1 million for school facility assessments.

The government remains committed to supporting early childhood, early education, and child care across the province, including the creation of 810 new child care spaces that are being developed as part of the 18 new elementary schools currently under construction on nine joint-use sites in Saskatoon, Regina, Warman, and Martensville.

In order to meet the needs of a growing and diverse province, the ministry's 2016-17 budget increases funding for classroom supports by \$4 million. Government is providing 288 million to school divisions for supports for learning funding in the 2016-17 school year. This funding includes supports for students with intensive needs, students in vulnerable circumstances, and students who require English as an additional language support. In addition, \$5.4 million of school operating funding is being targeted to support Syrian refugee students.

Funding for youth at high-risk facilities is also increasing by \$600,000 over last year to help address salary and enrolment pressures for a total investment of 5.8 million. Mr. Speaker, in Saskatoon we appreciate these new investments into our community and into our future. We are hopeful that they will continue to grow and that we will need many more joint-use schools very soon.

Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Saskatchewan's history, the highways and infrastructure budget tops \$1 billion. This marks another record investment in provincial roads and infrastructure. The \$1.15 billion 2016-17 highways and infrastructure budget includes \$355 million for capital construction, 30 million in new funding for the first year of the highways 2020 plan, a three-year \$70 million surge in highway repair and maintenance, and \$500 million for the Regina bypass. More than 1300 kilometres of provincial highways will see repairs or upgrades this year. Work will also continue on major projects like the Regina bypass and twinning of Highway 7 and 16 near Saskatoon.

[21:45]

Mr. Speaker, our government has always believed in the true Saskatchewan way — helping your neighbour. These neighbours that require our help sometimes are children, youth, and families, people with disabilities, and people needing income assistance and housing. Our government has been a trailblazer in investing in our people when they need it the most.

Social Services 2016-17 budget is \$1.052 billion dollars, a 5.1 increase from last fiscal year. This is good news for people of Saskatchewan who are needing a helping hand. Mr. Speaker, people in Saskatchewan with disabilities will see \$210 million dedicated to the Saskatchewan assured income for disability program to help make life better.

The 2016-17 budget also includes \$3.8 million for housing programs. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation will support the disability strategy, poverty reduction strategy, and mental health and addictions policy action plan by focusing on accessible, affordable housing for those most in need. It's hard to believe that under the NDP, people with disabilities had no income assistance program. Mr. Speaker, our government isn't

going to let that happen again.

In my constituency of Saskatoon University, there is the Sherbrooke Community Centre. This care home has been open since 1966. There are 263 residents, 100 community day program participants, 500 volunteers, family, friends, students, pets, and over 500 staff members. This community centre has been an innovator to long-term care. They have implemented many unique programs and services which is indeed keeping its residents happy, healthy, and involved in their community. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate to think that a facility like this would have been affected by the NDP's freeze on the seniors' income plan and their attempt to raise monthly fees for seniors in long-term care to 90 per cent of the seniors' income.

Mr. Speaker, seniors under our leadership have seen the SIP [seniors' income plan] program tripled to \$270 per month and have been introduced to a new personal care home benefit which helps provide low-income seniors over \$4,600 per year on average to assist with the cost of living in a care home. This budget is reducing the regional health authorities' administrations by \$7.5 million and reinvesting that funding to front-line staff in long-term care homes. These are direct dollars facilities like Sherbrooke will see and be able to utilize to improve the lives of the people they serve.

Mr. Speaker, last year my mayor, Mayor Don Atchison, said, and I quote: "I don't know how much more the city of Saskatoon could actually ask for." Mr. Speaker, when the mayor of the biggest city in our province can say those words about our government's budget, you know you have the right government getting the job done. Our government recognizes the need for infrastructure dollars. Budget 2016-17 provides more than \$3.5 billion for infrastructure, the largest single-year capital investment in the province's history.

Mr. Speaker, my city, Saskatoon, will receive more than forty-eight and a half million dollars in municipal revenue sharing this year. Mr. Speaker, due to complete in 2018, the north commuter parkway bridge project in Saskatoon will support the transportation needs of citizens in the northeast and the north industrial areas. Budget 2016-17 provides \$10 million towards this important project. This investment will provide significant benefits to the citizens of Saskatoon and in fact our whole province. Once completed, this bridge will be providing critical commuter connections in key areas of the city, addressing traffic congestion, reducing intersection delays, shortening travel times, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Speaker, traffic volume is expected to be up to 21,700 vehicles per day when this bridge opens. This will result in a 9 per cent reduction in existing traffic using the Circle Drive North bridge and additional reductions in traffic across the city's other bridges.

Mr. Speaker, it was tough times under the NDP government. In over 16 years of governance they only managed to invest just \$5 billion in infrastructure projects. They cut revenue sharing to municipalities several times and failed to implement a stable, predictable formula for municipal revenue sharing.

Since we have formed government, Mr. Speaker, citizens in this province have seen infrastructures go up. Our highways, schools, and hospitals have benefited from much-needed

infrastructure dollars. This year the provincial government's revenue sharing with municipalities will approach \$272 million, up 6.4 million from last year, and an increase of 144 million or more than 113 per cent since 2007.

Our party introduced a formula that ties the municipal revenue sharing to the province's economic growth by providing one point of the provincial sales tax to our municipalities. Mr. Speaker, as the Regina *Leader-Post* writes:

Municipal officials agreed that, as Mayor Michael Fougere put it, cities came out "unscathed" and could even look on the budget positively "given the environment."

Communities, both urban and rural, will see record revenue sharing and hiked funding for municipal infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, revenue sharing plays an important role in helping our municipalities meet the needs of people in cities, towns, and villages, and also in rural Saskatchewan. Urban revenue sharing for all cities, towns, villages, and resort villages will amount to almost \$175 million in 2016-17. Revenue sharing from rural municipalities which includes organized hamlets will total 76.7 million, and northern municipalities will receive just under \$20.3 million this fiscal year.

This budget also provides \$83.8 million in provincial support to municipal infrastructure through various programs: 21.4 million from the Ministry of Government Relations for provincial support under the new Building Canada Fund, 23.7 million from the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure for rural roads through the municipal road strategy and the urban connector program. The budget also provides \$50.8 million in other funding to municipalities from ministries including grants for such services and facilities as libraries, policing, urban parks, and transit assistance.

Investments in university facilities, regional colleges, and training facilities will help keep Saskatchewan strong today and into the future. In 2016-17, \$25.8 million is targeted for capital in the area of advanced education and training, with an estimated \$170 million provided to the sector over the next four years. This is good news for Saskatchewan university constituents.

The Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority says:

SREDA welcomes the approach taken in 2016-17 budget to keep the Saskatchewan economy strong during this period of economic transformation. [The] Continued investment in infrastructure, training, and agriculture bode well for the Saskatoon Region economy, as does the focus on keeping taxes low and controlling operational spending.

Mr. Speaker, this budget contains no tax increases. In fact since 2007, the Saskatchewan Party has provided nearly \$6 billion in tax reductions to family, individuals, homeowners, businesses, and farmers. We now enjoy, right here in Saskatchewan, one of the lowest personal and business tax burdens in Canada according to the Conference Board of Canada. I have to say it again, Mr. Speaker, that the NDP raised taxes 21 times in their last 16 years in government.

An Hon. Member: — How many?

Mr. Olason: — Twenty-one times, which is kind of hard to do, Mr. Speaker, as there is only one budget per year.

Our record, on the other hand, is that we have delivered record property tax reductions and record income tax reductions. A family of four now, Mr. Speaker, with a combined income of \$50,000 has seen their income tax reduced by 100 per cent. They will pay no provincial income tax in 2016. The Saskatchewan Party has reduced taxes for Saskatchewan people at every income level and eliminated the PST on used cars.

Under the NDP, from 2000 to 2007, Saskatchewan had the worst economic growth rate in Canada averaging just 1.7 per cent per year, well below the national average of 2.5 per cent. From 2008 to 2015 with the Saskatchewan Party in government, Saskatchewan has had the best economic growth rate in Canada averaging 2.5 per cent per year, well above the national average of 1.6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, as an example of what the municipal revenue sharing money is used for in Saskatoon, in the 2015 business plan and budget, the city received \$47.4 million from the municipal revenue sharing. In a general sense, the city allocated this money to various business lines to help them deliver programs and services that (a) increase public safety, (b) improve mobility of vehicles and people, and (c) enhance the city's overall quality of life.

The city of Saskatoon allocated the municipal revenue sharing fund — their share — as follows: police received 11.4 million; transportation, 10.4 million; fire, 7.1 million; recreation and parks, 5.7 million; transit received \$4.7 million, Mr. Speaker. Waste reduction was almost \$2 million, Mr. Speaker, and other important initiatives took \$3.8 million. This funding is very important to the city of Saskatoon and the people it serves. Without it the city of Saskatoon's clients and citizens wouldn't get the level of service that they get today. That money's very important, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP government from 1991-2007, 56,000 more people moved out of Saskatchewan than moved in and Saskatchewan's population stayed flat at around just 1 million people. Since the Sask Party was elected in 2007, over 85,000 more people have moved to Saskatchewan than moved out. And Saskatchewan's population has grown by over 132,000 people to an all-time high of over 100 . . . sorry, 1.142 million people. You have to ask yourself why, Mr. Speaker. It's because of opportunity, prosperity, and optimism. That's why people come here and that's why people are staying.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support budget 2016-17. Saskatchewan families, seniors, and students will be better off under another term of our government. A fragile global economy coupled with sharp declines in oil and potash prices present considerable challenges to our province's economy, its finances, and its people. We are continuing to keep taxes low, ensure sustainability of core services, and keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, I support the 2016-17 budget moved by the Minister of Finance and seconded by the member from Regina

University, with no amendments. Thank you.

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

Mr. Buckingham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give a reply to the budget released on June 1st, a budget that I think is very good for Saskatchewan, and one that will keep us focused on keeping Saskatchewan strong.

This budget put forth by the Minister of Finance will keep Saskatchewan strong by investing in people, investing in infrastructure, and with transformational change. We will invest in health care, education, and social services, which accounts for a large portion of the provincial expenses. This budget provides increases to health care, notably to reduce wait times for surgery and diagnostic services. Mr. Speaker, a record 5.17 billion will be invested in health care infrastructure, improving access to care. The 2016-17 health budget includes an increase of 57.4 million, or 1.1 per cent, over the 2015-16 budget. Incredibly, that is an increase of over 50 per cent since 2007. Mr. Speaker, a special commissioner will also be appointed to recommend options for fewer health regions and more efficient and effective delivery of health care services. The name of the commissioner will be announced in the coming days.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency is receiving more than \$167 million in this budget, up 9.8 million from last year. This substantial increase in funding will help pay for the additional 15 cancer drugs that were approved last year. Not that long ago, Mr. Speaker, under the NDP government, we had the longest wait times in Canada. Now Saskatchewan has some of the shortest wait times in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Although wait times have crept up a bit recently, this government remains committed to wait times and will invest another 20 million to make sure that those wait times are kept short.

[22:00]

And, Mr. Speaker, this government continues to put students first by investing in pre-K to grade 12 schools and classrooms across this province. This government has put student success and safety at the top of its priority list by increasing its overall investment in education by 7.8 per cent to a total of \$2.2 billion. This includes 391.4 million for capital investments. This government's investment in infrastructure includes 310.5 million for the 18 joint-use schools built on nine sites, 33.4 million for preventive maintenance and renewal, 4.6 million for emergency repairs, and 41.9 million for ongoing capital projects including St. Brieux, Langenburg, Gravelbourg, Martensville, as well as École Connaught, Sacred Heart, and the new Mâmawêyatîtan Centre replacing Scott Collegiate in Regina, and also 1 million for school facility assessments.

Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to supporting early education and child care across this province, including the creation of 810 new child care spaces that are being developed as part of the new 18 elementary schools currently under construction on nine joint-use sites in Saskatoon, Regina, Martensville, and Warman. Mr. Speaker, one of those investments is in my constituency of Saskatoon Westview. The new joint-use school being built in Hampton Village shows this government's commitment to education in Saskatoon

Westview. Mr. Speaker, I should also point out that this important school investment was voted against by their previous leader and that, under the NDP, they closed 176 schools. Mr. Speaker, by investing in post-secondary education and skills training, this government remains committed to building a solid foundation for Saskatchewan's future. This budget also continues to support early education and child care across the province.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues its unwavering support of the province's most vulnerable through programs and services for people experiencing disability and people who need income assistance and housing, overall supporting children, youth, seniors, and families. Mr. Speaker, this government continues its significant commitment to municipalities through revenue sharing. And as a previous mayor of a growing community, I can assure you that this is an important investment.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016-17 budget includes the largest single-year capital investment in infrastructure in Saskatchewan history with an investment of \$3.5 billion. Nearly 1.8 billion will be invested by Saskatchewan's Crown corporations and more than 1.7 billion invested in ministries and agencies this fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, this budget provides significant investment into highways and transportation infrastructure and is the largest capital spend in Saskatchewan history for K to 12 schools and education capital, for strong commitments to our health care infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, this government remains committed to new capital investment and maintaining existing infrastructure in our province.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan vision is to be the best place in Canada to live, to work, to start a business, to raise a family, and to build a life. Mr. Speaker, I think this budget keeps us focused on that vision despite being in a fragile global economy coupled with sharp declines in oil and potash prices.

Mr. Speaker, budget 2016-17 reaffirms our commitment to building on a solid foundation today and into the future with a responsible budget that will keep taxes low by controlling government operational spending and continuing to invest in infrastructure and government services for Saskatchewan people, with a plan to get back to balance. Mr. Speaker, this government has a sound fiscal track record of management over the past nine years with prudent spending, paying down debt, and keeping its GDP ratio among the lowest in Canada. These globally uncertain economic times, coupled with low commodity prices, give us opportunities to make positive changes to keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, a record 1.14 million people now call Saskatchewan home. And also a record number of people were employed in the province in 2015, and our unemployment rate is among the lowest in Canada. Mr. Speaker, this government's pursuit of balance is similar to its pursuit of growth. However, the pursuit of growth is not for its own sake. As our Premier has said, the purpose of growth is to secure a better way of life for all Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, this budget plan is with an eye to getting us back to balance and is sought to ensure the sustainability of the programs and services Saskatchewan people value and need

today and into the future. Mr. Speaker, this year marks the beginning of the government-wide exercise of transformational change to ensure the sustainability of high-quality public services delivered in the most effective way possible. Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that our services are viable now and into the future, especially in light of much lower resources revenues. Mr. Speaker, transformational change can be complex and require time to successfully implement. Government will need all of its partners across all sectors to work constructively together as changes are made to keep Saskatchewan strong.

Mr. Speaker, some of the questions we will be asking are: is this something government should be doing? Is this program or service the responsibility of government, and if so, Mr. Speaker, is it being delivered in the best possible manner and at the lowest cost possible to taxpayers? Are there a number of similar programs with similar objectives, and if so, can they be combined into one program that provides better results with lower cost? Could a different governance model provide administrative savings while still remaining responsive to Saskatchewan people? Mr. Speaker, by answering these questions and more, government programs and services will remain sustainable and keep Saskatchewan strong and make sure we are the best place to live, to work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life.

Mr. Speaker, this budget will keep Saskatchewan strong by not increasing taxes. And there will be no new taxes. During these times, Mr. Speaker, of an uncertain global economy and low commodity prices, it is important to not raise taxes. I think it is also important to remind people as well that during the NDP's last time in government they raised taxes 21 times in 16 years.

Mr. Speaker, since 2008, tax reductions have saved taxpayers \$5.9 billion, and Saskatchewan has among the lowest personal and business tax burdens in Canada according to The Conference Board of Canada's report which was released in April 2016. Mr. Speaker, a family of four with \$100,000 in combined income will see a savings of \$2,519 in provincial tax in 2016 compared to 2007. And that money will be much more effectively spent when taxpayers are left with it in their own pockets.

Mr. Speaker, just as government will consider transformational change and how it delivers services and programs to ensure sustainability at the lowest cost, government also needs to consider its sources of revenue. Is the revenue sustainable and adequate to fund services Saskatchewan people value? Could they be simplified? Is dependence on volatile revenue from natural resources too high? Mr. Speaker, if we are to embrace transformational change, we need to ask the important questions on revenue and spending. This is the balance Saskatchewan sees.

Mr. Speaker, this government's decision was to keep mill rates for education property taxes constant this year. Since education property tax reform in 2009, mill rates have only been lowered and have not been adjusted for inflation, while enrolments, teachers' salaries, and operating costs have increased.

Mr. Speaker, this government is helping post-secondary graduates afford a home and stay in Saskatchewan by introducing the graduate retention program first home plan.

This is the most aggressive youth retention program in Canada, providing personal income tax credits to rebate up to 20,000 in tuition fees to post-secondary students. Since its creation, about 58,000 post-secondary grads have received nearly 200 million in tuition rebates. Mr. Speaker, this first home plan gives eligible graduates the ability to use up to \$10,000 of their future graduate retention program tax credit as an interest-free loan to use towards their down payment on their first home in the province.

Mr. Speaker, investing in infrastructure builds Saskatchewan's strength and will show us a return now and in the future as it builds a structural network to help Saskatchewan's economy grow. This important capital investment will keep Saskatchewan strong by supporting construction jobs while other sectors are feeling the downturn. These investments improve safety on our roads and expands and improves our transportation system which is vitally important to Saskatchewan's export-driven province.

Mr. Speaker, one of the 2016-17 budget highlights is 875.7 million invested in transportation infrastructure to keep Saskatchewan's economy moving forward. This is an increase of 294.7 million or 50.7 per cent from last year's budget. The Saskatchewan Builds capital plan outlines 3.1 billion in capital through the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure over the next four years. The highways 2020 plan outlines a three-year \$70 million surge to fix more highways. There is 30 million being invested in preservation and rehabilitation to meet the first year of the commitment, a 20 per cent increase over 2015-16. There is also 20 million committed for each of the next two years. Mr. Speaker, work also continues on the Regina bypass that is scheduled to be complete by October 2019 and will greatly improve safety and improve the efficient movement of people and goods in our province.

Mr. Speaker, these investments in infrastructure will create better learning places for children attending elementary, secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions. These important capital investments will also help in the delivery of quality health care and long-term care by building hospitals and facilities suited for these needs. The Saskatchewan Builds capital plan will build and maintain needed infrastructure like schools, health care facilities, municipal infrastructure, roads, bridges, and highways. This government's investment in core infrastructure is nearly 9.6 billion since 2008-2009 and it's more than 1 billion per year on average.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes funding for highway twinning and passing lane projects on Highways 5, 6, 7, 16, and 39, as well as investments in interchanges in Martensville and Warman. Mr. Speaker, there is 10 million in the 2016-17 budget for the first year of the province's commitment to the north commuter parkway bridge. It is part of a three-year, \$50 million commitment on a project in Saskatoon that will help ease congestion on existing bridges.

Mr. Speaker, another important investment in infrastructure is municipal infrastructure. Over 1.1 billion has been invested in municipal infrastructure since 2008-2009. Funding of 127.5 million has been included in this budget with plans to invest an additional 325 million by 2019-20. Including all three levels of government, the new Building Canada plan is expected to result

in over 1 billion in new investment in infrastructure by 2023-24.

[22:15]

Mr. Speaker, this budget is built from a strong base, but unfortunately not every request can be met. However health, education, and social services and assistance expense is projected to be 10.52 billion in 2016-17, up 143 million or 1.4 per cent from the 2015-16 budget.

Mr. Speaker, debt management is also an important part of keeping Saskatchewan strong. I'm proud to say that our province's credit ratings are among the highest in Canada. Saskatchewan's percentage of total debt to GDP is 17.6 per cent as of March 31st, 2016 and is the second lowest among the provinces.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016-17 budget is a budget I am very proud of. It was not an easy task for this government to face the challenges of lower revenues of \$1 billion. However I think the Minister of Finance and his officials have done an incredible job of balancing the needs of a growing province. This budget, Mr. Speaker, has been very well received by the people in the business community in Saskatchewan.

I think it is better though at times to let others judge how you have done. And with that I will quote Steve McLellan, CEO of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce. And I quote:

We are quite pleased. At the end of the day we expected this deficit to be larger. Four hundred-plus is not a small number, but as compared to other jurisdictions, we are still in a very good situation.

And the thing, I think, two things we are very impressed with is: one, is that they are proposing to be out of deficit by next year; and two, they are welcoming the input of the general public and the business community to try and solve some of the financial situations. We are going to be big parts of the solutions.

Mr. Speaker, companies are investing in our province. Over the past eight and a half years, we have seen record business investment in our province. Even today, there was a multi-billion-dollar investment announcement from Raging River resources into drilling and enhanced oil recovery projects in the Kindersley area. This is evidence of how our government has created an environment where business has confidence in the long-term financial and economic prospects of our province. Neil Roszell said there's evidence of consistency in the province and no geopolitical risk.

Mr. Speaker, I, and I am confident the people of Saskatchewan, support the budget put forward by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member from Regina University, and I will not be supporting any amendments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Makowsky: — Well thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The first thing I'd like to say: hey, it's great to be back. It's great to be back. In my previous career, it was kind of like cut-down

day in the CFL [Canadian Football League]. You're not sure who's going to survive, who's going to make it to the team. And I guess every day there's sort of that feeling that you might not be back. But here at least you get four more years. There's members that retire, unfortunately members that weren't successful that reran, and so those are tough times and you lose some good people sometimes. And so you know, that's too bad but that's the profession we choose and that's the way it goes sometimes.

I know that . . . This time of year I've never been in the House when the Riders are at camp. And I know those are tough days; those are long days. Sometimes the next day you're so sore you can barely get out of bed and then you go look at the schedule for the upcoming practice day and there's inside run. And for the linemen that's basically like a couple of games every day for about two weeks, and you die a little every day when you take a look at that schedule.

But coaches always remind you, and you've got to remind yourself every once in a while, that it's tough sometimes but there's lots of people . . . There's a long line that would take your place. And I think that's the case with this job as well. There was a lot of great candidates for all the parties that put their names forward, and I think that's great for our democracy, and I think that's, as I said, a good thing. And I think I like the set-up of this room. I think we've got a lot of good new members. We've got a good team over here. I listened carefully to all the speeches in the Throne Speech and the budget speech, and they were outstanding. Fourteen new members on this side, even more than the entire opposition caucus. I had mentioned that.

Also the Riders — and, Mr. Speaker, I try and work this into my speech whenever I can — not sure how they'll do but they at least have a chance to win the Grey Cup, the old Riders. Because of course, the members opposite are in government and we know the history of that within our province. It's been a shutout with the NDP for Grey Cups in our province for over 100 years, Mr. Speaker, over 100 years of this building.

Before I forget, Mr. Speaker, really quick, I was interested to hear the member from Northcote. And I congratulate her: the NDP finally took a position on the new stadium for the Riders as last year, the old Mosaic Stadium, and she was against it so, you know, we finally hear . . . I'd like to hear what the Regina MLAs on that side have to say about it. I've been trying to get it out of them for many years now.

But again, I applaud the member from Northcote. She said it was a mismanaged project, part of the misplaced priorities of this government. And so I remind that member that it's a city of Regina project. And so just like that happened in Prince Albert: the construction of the Alfred Jenkins Field House that was done by the municipality of Prince Albert; and the government through PCS [Parks, Culture and Sport] helped them out on that portion; renovations for the Art Hauser Centre, 1.7 million. So I understand from her point of view, those aren't good as well. So she can maybe tell her constituents about that.

She doesn't want the Regina bypass but she wants another bridge in Prince Albert. So what's wrong with Regina? It's the Queen City. I kind of like it here, Mr. Speaker.

I don't have a lot of time, Mr. Speaker. I will hopefully get to a part of the budget speech. This is my first time in the House and again, with a large caucus, you know, you don't get a lot of speaking time, and so you've got to make your time count. And so just real quickly, I'd like to thank members of my campaign team, like other members have done. And boy, they worked really hard. We had a small group but I took care of the door knocking and they took care of everything else, and that worked real good. I don't have time to mention them all but we had a lot of fun. And of course we were successful. That makes it even more fun.

I'd like to thank, of course, my family. My family helped me out on the campaign when they could. We're a very busy family of course. Three boys, they're very busy in sports and other things and school and such. And you know, they helped out a bit. I had to bribe them with slurpees once in a while, but they came out. Got to thank my wife, Tami. I mean obviously the bedrock of our family. She essentially runs two households, ours, and then we have elderly folks that we help out a lot with that way. And she works as well. She's an RN [registered nurse]. And she's a great door knocker. She's been at it for a while and definitely very up on the health file and helps me out a lot that way. And she definitely remembers the '90s, under the members opposite. She definitely remembers those. We could go on in that area for quite some time, Mr. Speaker.

Of course the people of Regina Gardiner Park, a new constituency, slightly new boundaries, Mr. Speaker, in that part of Regina, and again proud to represent them. It's an honour to be here. Lots of great families and boy, I enjoyed it. Again I had great conversations with all the folks. They're very informed, and it really helps you as a member to know what's important to them, first of all, but also helps you with your knowledge of all the things that are in the platform and what the government's done, etc. And I've really enjoyed those conversations. Knew quite a bit of families in the area, again as the boundaries changed. A lot of kids go to my kids' school, and I was able to coach a lot of the kids in the families in that area over the years.

And just a few real quick stories. I went to a door and a former player recognized me and was a little surprised that I was at the door. And he asked me, what are you doing here, coach? I don't know if I can use my name or not. And he, well, what are you doing? Well it's part of my job. And he asked, are you a door-to-door salesman? And well kind of, yes I am. And he said to his mom, Mom, coach wants to sell you something. So I guess that was part of it. I had one little guy, he helped me deliver flyers, and I think that's pretty good for a 10-year-old to help out that way. Not many kids would do that.

Another former player, his neighbour had an orange sign on it, and he wasn't too impressed with that. So he made his dad come to the office and get one of our biggest signs to put on the lawn. And he got his older brother out of bed to get to the voting place, who happened to be just turning 18. So I guess I coached him a little bit of persistence. And boy, those are great times, Mr. Speaker. And you're not sure if you have an impact on those guys, but I think some of those stories, it reinforces that you are too.

But I guess on the other hand though, Mr. Speaker, I had a guy in flag football. You know, you ask him what position you want

to play today and he said, oh coach, I want to play quarterback. And I said okay, yes, that's great. And then he said to me, what's the quarterback again? So maybe I'm not quite getting through to them to the extent I was hoping for.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really limited in the time I have here this evening and I just want to talk real quick just about the budget and some of the replies I heard, especially from the Finance critic, Mr. Speaker. There were some things that were in her reply speech that weren't quite accurate or it didn't really, you know, I didn't like. They didn't really jibe.

She talked about the failed bypass project. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's being built right now. I'm not sure how you can judge it as a failure already. I mean I suggest she maybe go take a drive out on Victoria Avenue East and all the earth that's been moved and the massive project it is and how important it's going to be for the safety.

And I know the member from Northcote as well didn't like it. And I heard the other day from the new leader and, you know, there was definitely some misinformation going out about the bypass. He said it was \$1 billion over budget. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that disparages this House when there is such misinformation going out. Of course it's an apples-to-oranges comparison. The scope of the project has increased greatly and it's going to be a great project for not only Saskatchewan but of course Regina and area. That's all I can say about that, but there is much more I could say about that.

They talked about power rates going up 5 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And coming from that member who actively supported the Leap Manifesto . . . You know, if we ever get the NDP in power again, Mr. Speaker, we'll be pining for the halcyon days of only 5 per cent increases, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen what's going to happen in Ontario, in other parts of Europe, Mr. Speaker. You know power rates have gone through the roof. It's hurt their economy. New businesses won't be coming to those jurisdictions I'm sure. The member from Nutana supported the Leap Manifesto as I mentioned. She . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, she doesn't. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? It's right here in the *Leader-Post* April 16th, Murray Mandryk, the reputable reporter who's been around for 30-plus years. They like to deny it. They don't think that . . . It didn't happen. They just try to pretend it doesn't happen, Mr. Speaker, but right here it says, "Interestingly . . ." This is a quote; I'm sorry. "Interestingly, re-elected Saskatoon Nutana MLA Cathy Sproule was the one caucus member who voted in favour of the Leap Manifesto [It says right here, granted] for reasons she says had to do with simply having the environment discussion."

Well, Mr. Speaker, you're either for or you're against it. I think those members are definitely for it, especially when they're not in Regina, okay? It's like Mr. Mulcair. He went down to the United States when he was the leader, bashed Canada — something you just never do, Mr. Speaker. Members of the NDP when they're with their friends in, you know, far-off places, they bash Saskatchewan privately I think. And this proves it here, the support for the Leap Manifesto. They change their tune. So again, Mr. Speaker, the NDP's firmly on both sides of the fence on a lot of issues. Unfortunately I have a long

catalogue here, Mr. Speaker. I wish I had a little more time. I wish I had a little more time.

Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the Leap Manifesto here, Mr. Speaker, and it's good to hear the members opposite shouting. That means I must be on the right path, Mr. Speaker. Just in some of these first opening lines of the Leap Manifesto it says the new jobs, the non-renewable jobs ". . . and opportunities of this transition are designed to systematically eliminate racial and gender inequality." So overnight, Mr. Speaker, turning a turbine from using natural gas or coal to wind power is just going to change that.

Of course we need a few more details. So this is a leap manifesto. There's quite a few leaps in logic in this document supported by the NDP, Mr. Speaker. Maybe in a next speech, Mr. Speaker, I'll be able to go into more detail about this document that's hugely, hugely negative to the economy of Saskatchewan. It would be a disaster for Saskatchewan and certainly if those members ever became government again, Mr. Speaker.

I wish I got to all the great points of the budget, Mr. Speaker. I would really like to support the budget, Mr. Speaker. I'm definitely not going to be supporting the amendment. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: — It now being 10:30, this Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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Minister Responsible for The Global
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