



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

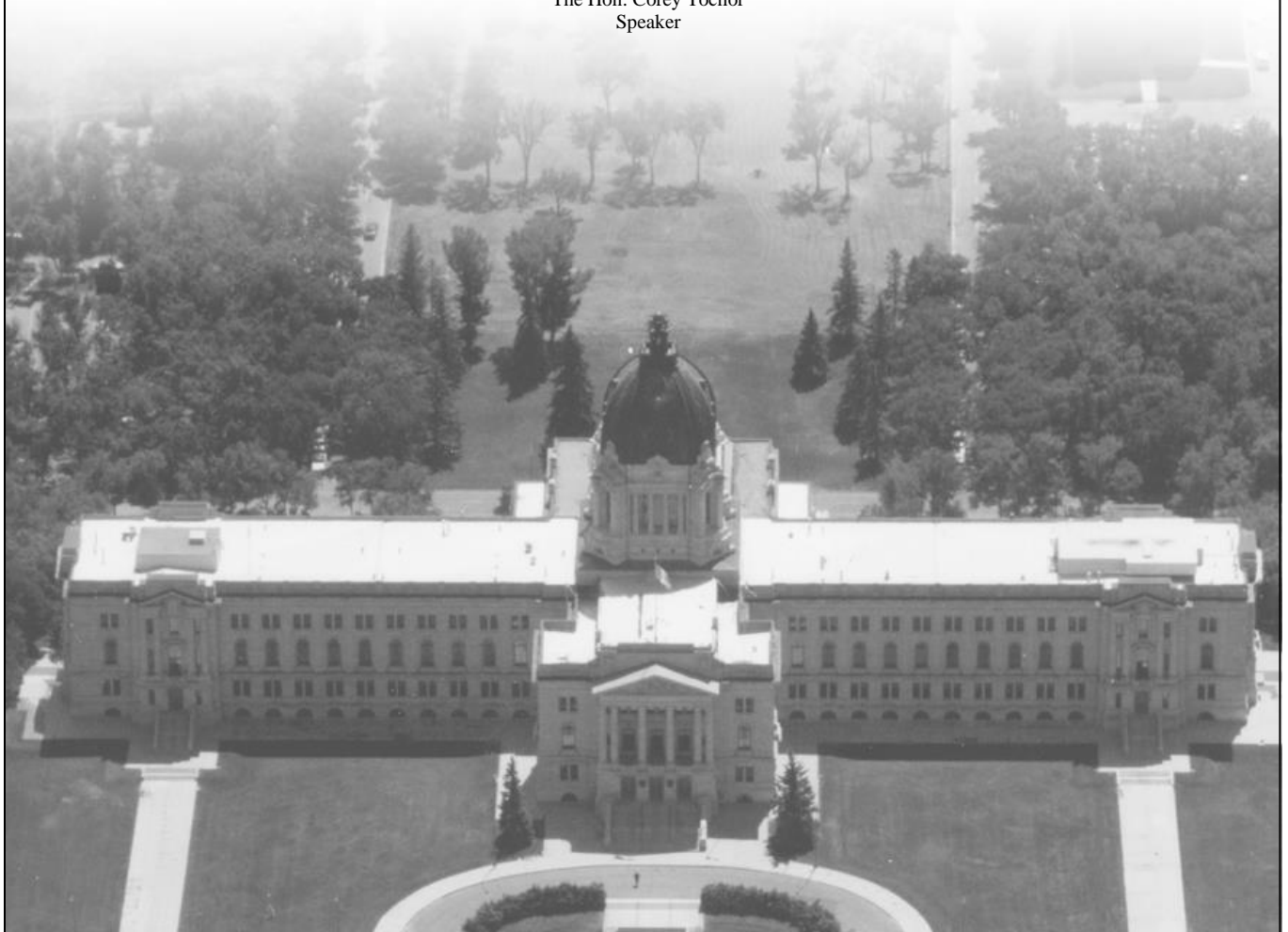
of the

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 o'clock, I'll call this Assembly to order.

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.]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Arm River.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have just a few more comments before I turn the floor over to one of my other colleagues. You know, as we move forward, you know, I'll talk quickly on some of the highlights of this budget.

You know, we still have the lowest PST [provincial sales tax] rate of any province with a provincial sales tax, even with an increase. And we're passing on more savings, like the family of four in Saskatchewan now pays no income tax on the first \$50,000 of income, the highest tax-free threshold in Canada. As a result of this budget, Saskatchewan individuals and families will pay among the lowest income taxes in Canada, ranging from the lowest to third lowest for most, depending on levels of income.

You know, this budget supports agriculture in a big way again. There's been another little bit of an increase. We've increased through irrigation, through crop insurance, you know, whatever, as we move forward with ag. You know, that's an important part of this economy.

Highways, you know, tops record spending again, second year in a row. Major projects, which is a bypass around Regina, never mind some of the stuff that has been in my constituency. The opposition will get up and they'll slam everything that we did no matter what project it is, whether from this year, last year, all the way back to 2007. They'll blame us for everything from the coldest winter to the hottest summer.

You know, highways in my constituency, this will grade and pave Highway 16 near Dafoe, repaving Highway 11 near Bladworth and Dundurn. You know, those are two \$5 million projects each. Grade and pave Highway 15 west of Highway 2 junction, another \$6 million project; grade and pave Highway 42 from Keeler to Eyebrow, \$7.4 million project. You know, they'll get up and they'll slam that. Why are you spending money there? Why are you spending money here?

And yet when we spend money, you know, they're against it, and yet they turn around in the next breath, ask, we have to

spend more. You know, that just shows another opposition again. Year after year I've sat here and listened to them come up with no plan for . . . This is what, going on the ninth year now. They've slammed every budget we've had and, as we move forward, the people still keep voting for us. And they're going to keep voting for us because they know the direction we're moving this province.

You just get up without a plan and you just knock us down for the last speeches that are going to come from the ones that are left, you know. And it's not going to help you one little bit to get a plan that's out there, at least to offer something to the residents of this province because I'll tell you what. I'm proud of this budget. Even though it's tough times, I'm proud of what we had to do and the challenges that we've met. And the residents that I've talked to are all like, yes it had to be done. We do not want to go down the road of heavy debt that we had before. We do not want to go down of driving this province back to where kids are leaving, there is no jobs.

You know, Mr. Speaker, you know we've increased funding again in health care, not as much as we have in previous years, but there's still an increase in health and there's also a heavy increase in social services. We're trying to help every level of every person in this province.

You know, unlike the members opposite when I was in opposition, you know, didn't help anything. They cut ag. They cut social services. They cut education. They cut health. All the years I was here in opposition I watched each one of their budgets cut every year because they kept losing people and they kept losing money so they had no choice.

This province is growing. We've had how many more people in the last, just the last stats that come out, over 160,000 in the last, you know, now a decade. Ten years — you know, that's pretty good growth for this province.

I can remember when the member from, oh was it . . . She was an NDP [New Democratic Party] cabinet minister. Doreen Hamilton got up and said, you know what? It's statistically impossible to grow this province by 1 per cent a year. She said that's impossible . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . You guys are right. She got up and just slammed — and that was our plan when in opposition — she got up and just slammed it. And I'm like, where are you today, Doreen? Like where are you today with that? To even say something like that.

And so when I listen, maybe I get a little worked up when I listen to the opposition. Year after year after year we've been here. Just criticize and criticize and criticize, and yet never come up with an idea. Not nothing. Not one iota of, what would we do different except, you're just wrong. You're just wrong.

Well I tell you what. And I . . . you know, they're saying things. Next election, it'll be the same results over there than it is here. You know, if you . . . Anyways my time, I think, is coming up because I have another MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] wants to get up and speak.

But I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this budget that's meeting this challenges. I'm proud of what we've had to

do in tough times, and I'll be supporting this budget. As for their amendment or motion or whatever it is, it's not worth the paper it was wrote on.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Estevan.

Ms. Carr: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to be able to respond to the budget. And I would like to add at the beginning of my comments that I will be supporting this budget. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, I was newly elected on April 4th, 2016, so this is the second budget that I have had the opportunity to address.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to talk a little bit more about the people who have supported me and worked with me over the past year. It truly has been a learning experience for myself. Some days it felt like I was drinking out of a water hose, but there was always support there for me along the way.

First and foremost I would like to thank my family. I would like to thank my partner, Bart, for being there for me while we both have gotten used to this new schedule that we're on. I thank him for patiently standing by my side when we are in the grocery store or when we go out for dinner or even at a social event and a constituent comes up to me and wants to address government matters.

I knew what I would be signing up for when I ran for public office, but I don't really think Bart knew exactly what he was going to be in for. He has even had to report to me that he had to tell people he's not their MLA and they would have to contact me. Now I don't know how many of you have actually met Bart, but he's not exactly what you would call politically correct. So I appreciate the fact that he does not try and answer for me or give his opinion and passes them back to me. So thank you, Bart, for your patience during this time of transition.

Mr. Speaker, I truly believe you're never too old to thank your parents. My parents, Stan and Jolene Wicks, have always been there for me. They have been my biggest supporters through this journey that I have embarked on and continue to be my biggest supporters. So thank you very much to them for teaching me the work ethic that I have and the work ethic that I've been able to bring to the new position that I hold now.

And speaking of the position that I hold, I did not get here by myself. It took a team of people to help me out, and it takes a team of people to keep things going. So to my constituency association back in Estevan, thank you for always being there and supporting me in the past, now, and into the future. I truly appreciate the work that you do.

And, Mr. Speaker, to my constituency assistants who work back in my office, Rosalie Story, Susan Colbow, and Gale Hilstrom, they are continually dealing with our constituents on a day-to-day basis. They anticipate what I will need to help deal with the constituents on any matters they may have. These ladies worked with the previous MLA, Doreen Eagles, and now I am lucky to have them work with me. Thank you, ladies.

Mr. Speaker, this past year has been a year of firsts for myself. One of the things I have come to know over the past year is the

fact that the leader of the party and cabinet ministers of this government have the best interest of the province of Saskatchewan and the people of Saskatchewan at heart. These people, along with the remainder of the Saskatchewan Party caucus, have looked very hard at the finances of the province and have made some necessary decisions to ensure a successful future for this province.

The title of this year's budget is called *Meeting the Challenge*. And what is the challenge that is facing Saskatchewan? Since 2014-15, resource revenues have declined over \$1.3 billion. Tax revenue is down by hundreds of millions of dollars due to the resource sector slowdown. People just aren't working; therefore they're not paying taxes. The population has grown by 162,000 people over the past 10 years, which puts added pressure on our vital services.

The budget that has been presented by the Finance minister is fiscally responsible and takes into consideration the needs of the province of Saskatchewan and the people who live here. This budget is what the people of Saskatchewan require in this time of tight financial constraint. This budget will continue to work with the people of Saskatchewan to continue to keep the province strong and moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, if I could summarize what I'm going to talk about today, this budget will control and reduce government spending. This budget will modernize and expand the tax system. This budget will keep the economy strong. This budget will invest in priority areas. And, lastly, our goal will be to return to balance over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, since this budget has come out, there have obviously been some opinions that have come out also. I read an interesting article the other day from *Maclean's*. The title of the article was "Saskatchewan swallows the fiscal pill Alberta refuses." Then it goes on to say "Through restraint and strategic tax hikes, Saskatchewan shows how to get off the royalty rollercoaster." For any of you that have the time, I encourage you to read this article.

I believe with some of the responses you have heard, there is a clear theme that should be coming out. The overall goal of this budget is to keep Saskatchewan strong. Over the past 10 years, we have significantly invested in all different areas of the budget. As a result, this budget builds on a very solid foundation. But there are changes that will need to occur to continue to be successful.

There is one fundamental change that is taking place in this budget. We have come to the realization that we cannot base our projections on resource revenues because, as we have all seen, the resource revenues have been very volatile over the past couple of years. Without those revenues we need to re-evaluate the way we do business while still keeping Saskatchewan strong.

The reality is a decline of \$1.3 billion in revenue has made this budget even more challenging. Having said that, on April 4th, 2016 I was elected based on a campaign that made few specific promises but instead made one simple yet significant commitment: to keep Saskatchewan strong. And that is exactly what I plan to help do, and I believe that is what this budget will

do.

For a number of years, high commodity prices meant Saskatchewan's resource revenues were extremely strong, around \$2.5 billion a year. Resource revenue has allowed this province to do many things. We've encouraged new investment and new jobs through lower small business taxes and new growth tax incentives. We've been able to hire more teachers in our schools, and I'm very proud to say that two of those teachers are two of my daughters. One teaches in Saskatoon and one in Estevan.

We've been able to hire more doctors. At one point in Estevan the constituents . . . I guess I should say more specifically Sun Country Health Region was down to 50 per cent of the doctors that we needed. But in collaboration with this government a group effort was made and we were able to bring us up to a full complement. Resources have also allowed this province to hire more nurses of all designations as well as reducing surgical wait times.

It has also allowed this government to lower income taxes. In fact let me expand a little bit on that topic. An individual taxpayer pays no Saskatchewan tax on the first \$18,960. That's a pretty high number before you have to pay any income tax, if you actually think about it. A family of four with a \$50,000 annual income has now seen their provincial income tax cut by more than 95 per cent since 2007, from about \$2,302 a year to zero.

I would like to just repeat that fact. A family of four with \$50,000 in annual income will pay zero Saskatchewan income tax. Since 2007 this government has removed 112,000 people off of the provincial income tax roll. That's 112,000 people that have incomes at a level where they don't have to pay income tax. I think that's pretty significant.

The resource revenue has also allowed this government to pay down operating debt while at the same time being able to build highways, schools, and hospitals.

[19:15]

And let's not forget the \$6.7 million that are back in the pockets of our taxpayers. Because of the tax decreases over the years, we've been able to let these people spend that money, use it as disposable income on things that they need. I believe we can all agree that all of these things are just some of the very worthwhile investments that high resource revenues allowed us to make for the benefit of the Saskatchewan people.

We are very fortunate to live in a province like Saskatchewan. We have such a diverse economy and this has served this province well. However, despite our more diversified economy, we still had an overreliance on the resource revenues to fund government services based on an expectation that commodity prices and resource revenues would remain high.

Now I'm not sure how many of you know how we forecast what the income of this province will be, especially when it comes to resource revenue, so I think I'll take a little bit of time and let you know. There are different indicators out there. Now these indicators are industry specific and they are industry

professionals. Different organizations will forecast what they think the range of revenue will be at a high end and in a low end. Over the past couple of years, it has dipped lower than what has been forecasted by these professionals, lower than anybody could have ever imagined.

Which reminds me of another article that I read in the past couple of days. This one was from *The Financial Post*. The headline was, "Compared to Ottawa's budget, Saskatchewan's is a fiscally prudent dream." In this article it goes on to say that the feds could learn something from Saskatchewan. Once again, another great read, and I would encourage anybody that has the time to read it.

Mr. Speaker, some of the decisions we made while deliberating this 2017-18 budget were not easy decisions. As with all budget deliberations, those decisions will affect the people of the province of Saskatchewan. So I'm going to touch on the subject of asking the public sector compensation savings to come in at \$250 million. I know this has been and will continue to be a contentious issue among our public sector.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note that some of the people that I am talking about are near and dear to my heart. In my close inner circle, this decision will affect my daughters — Miranda, who teaches grade 1 in Saskatoon, and Mercedes, who teaches grade 4 in Estevan. Both of these young ladies have started their teaching careers here in Saskatchewan over the past couple of years. And I might add that they had choices but chose to stay in Saskatchewan to start their careers. And on a bit of a side note, they've both started dating nice local Saskatchewan boys, so hopefully it's promising that they'll stay in Saskatchewan and start their families here.

Then there's my brother-in-law Neil, who is a machinist with SaskPower in Saskatoon. He has been a hard-working member of the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] for 25 years.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm very fortunate that during the summer months, I enjoy the company of three wonderful ladies every Tuesday night while we play ladies' night golf. One has been a friend for the past 30 years. She has a husband and a son who both work at Boundary dam power station as heavy-duty mechanics. One is a girl who I've known since my youth, and her husband is an electrician down at Boundary dam power station. And the last girl who golfs with me on these very enjoyable evenings has worked at SaskPower for the past eight years and is a business analyst in accounts payable at Boundary dam power station.

I also have a couple of girlfriends that I went to high school with who enjoy working in social services in different areas across the province.

I could name a number of other people who I would consider to be friends that work in the public sector within the province of Saskatchewan, but I believe you can see the people who are dear and near to me will be directly affected by decisions that we are all making in this budget. So you must know that any decisions being made are not being taken lightly by myself.

You may have wondered why I talked about resource revenues

so much earlier in my speech. I think as I continue, it will become abundantly clear. Over the past few years our government has been blessed with the resource revenue that has come to the province of Saskatchewan, which has also meant that we have been very generous with our public sector and have not had to say no to them on very many occasions. This public sector has enjoyed increases and benefits over the past few years even though the revenue of the province has been declining, while at the same time the resource sector has been struggling.

We have had people in the private industry who have been greatly affected. Over the past couple of years the employees and labourers who work in this industry have been asked to do several things. They've been asked to job share. They've been asked to take pay cuts — some of them have been as high as 40 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And some of them have been laid off completely. These people are not all just basic labourers. These people are engineers; they're rig hands; they're accountants; they're office workers, and that's just to name a few of the professions that have been affected by this.

So we've all heard and are seeing that there is a little bit of a recovery happening in this sector. But let's keep this in perspective. Oil is still lingering at \$50 a barrel. While things were slow, the cost curve of the resource industry was bent down and it is being reflected in what is happening with the people who are being hired back in this industry. I know of an employee who was laid off two years ago. He was making \$31 an hour at that point in time. This employee has been fortunate enough to be hired back now. He's doing the exact same job and he has been hired back at \$18 an hour, so as you can see things are not the same as when oil was averaging \$110 per barrel.

Mr. Speaker, it has come to a head and it is time to bend the cost curve and change the way we collect revenue in the province of Saskatchewan. We need to become less reliant on the resource sector and find revenue streams that are more predictable. This is one of the reasons the decision was made to remove some of the exemptions that were in place for PST and raising the rate to 6 per cent. And I believe it is important to note that Saskatchewan will still have the lowest PST rate of any province that collects provincial sales tax.

As well of importance is, as a result of this budget, Saskatchewan individuals and families will pay amongst the lowest income taxes in Canada, ranging from the lowest to the third lowest for most depending on their level of income. At the same time, we as a government need to bend our cost curve and make a responsible decision when it comes to spending. That is why we as MLAs and ministers have taken a 3.5 per cent rollback on our salaries and we are going to be asking our public sector to bend their cost curve, but we need to lead by example and that is exactly what we are doing.

There are other ways we have decided to go to help reduce spending. As everyone is already aware, we are in the process of consolidating 12 health regional authorities into one. We have also made the decision to discontinue with executive air operations and they are being wound down and the airplanes will be sold.

And lastly, we decided to wind down Saskatchewan Transportation Company. As ridership has declined and costs have increased, STC's [Saskatchewan Transportation Company] subsidy reached unsustainable levels. STC's per-passenger subsidy have grown from \$25 per year 10 years ago to approximately \$94 per passenger today. I have friends and family who on occasion have used this service. So once again, I want you to know that I did not nor do I take this decision lightly.

Our government's track record of sound fiscal management over the past nine years including prudent spending, paying down debt, and keeping our debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio among the lowest in the country provides capacity to borrow in order to move forward on our capital plan instead of delaying projects which would hurt our economy and cost more to build in the future.

Mr. Speaker, after having served proudly on Estevan City Council for 10 years, I'm pleased to see that revenue sharing has been kept whole on this budget. These funds are used for several different uses within the municipalities, whether it be operation spending, capital projects, or infrastructure projects. The city of Estevan as well as all of the municipalities across the province of Saskatchewan have benefited greatly from this funding.

On the flip side, we are still asking municipalities to be part of our plan. So in our plan we are cutting back on some of the grants-in-lieu, something that we consider to be a fair compromise. While the province is making some very tough decisions on what programs and services will be cut, we cannot continue to subsidize municipalities at the levels we have been. It is simply not sustainable.

As we continue to invest in the people of Saskatchewan, it is important that we make sure our commitments are met. Investing in the people ensures a continued high quality of life for our province.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many other areas I would like to touch on, but I know my colleagues will be talking about some of those. So the last thing I would like to touch on is that this government has a plan. We are not just kicking the can down the road. We have a plan to return to balance over the next three years. It would be nice if we could do this faster, but we do not want to harm our economy or the people of Saskatchewan by getting to balance immediately. So with the right checks and balances in place, we should be able to ensure that we do return to balance within three years.

This has been a decision; this has been decision time. Do we want to do what's best for the people of the province? Do we want to keep Saskatchewan moving forward or do we want to go back to the way things were under the NDP government? I think it is clear. We want to keep moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, if I could summarize what I have talked about today, this budget will be controlling and reducing government spending. This budget will modernize and expand our tax system. This budget will keep our economy strong. This budget will invest in priority areas. And lastly our goal will be to return to balance over the next three years.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say how humbled I am to be in this House and to have the opportunity to speak to the budget that has been presented. I am in favour of keeping Saskatchewan strong and moving forward. I believe that is exactly what this budget does, Mr. Speaker. The title of this budget is *Meeting the Challenge*, and that is what we are doing. I will not be supporting the amendment brought forward by our opposition, so once again I would like to say I support the budget presented by this government. Thank you.

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

Ms. Chartier: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to wade into the debate on the budget here today. It's been, well, seven years now since I've . . . seven and a half years, so I've got a few budget speeches under my belt, Mr. Speaker.

I think the one thing I'd like to dispense with first is a birthday wish to my . . . a belated birthday wish to my 19-year-old daughter who celebrated her birthday on Saturday, which is pretty hard for me to believe that Hennessey is 19. It didn't seem like that long ago that I was 19, but apparently it was.

And it's my kids, actually, Hennessey and Ophelia, who really are the reason why I'm here, Mr. Speaker, them and their cohort. I think about all the kids and grandkids to come and, really, when I got involved and put my name forward, it was . . . got involved in politics and put my name forward, it was about making a better world for them, Mr. Speaker. So this is about them, but they also sure feel the sacrifice or make huge sacrifices so their mom can come here and be the voice of Saskatoon Riversdale. So a big thanks to my kids, Hennessey and Ophelia. Ophelia told me a couple Saturdays ago when I was dragging her to yet another meeting, she said to me, "Mom, there should be no more meetings on Saturday." But I don't think that that's possible to legislate that, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to also thank my sister and her husband who are like another set of parents to my kids. My sister Michelle is invaluable in my life and in my kids' lives, and I really am grateful that she is willing to give so much of her time for my kids. My parents who despite some of their own challenges with aging still take my dog, Taxi, every week when I head out to Regina on Sunday night. So they've got lots going on in their own life but they're still very willing to be there for me as well.

[19:30]

I want to thank my assistants, Vanessa and Judy, who have busy lives themselves. Vanessa — with three kids, an art career, school, a husband who's in full-time school — she's very busy, Mr. Speaker. And Judy, who is in my office one day a week, is a very busy grandma. So thank you to those folks for all that they do to allow me to serve Saskatoon Riversdale.

I want to say thank you to the people of Saskatoon Riversdale who've sent me to the legislature three times now to give me the privilege of being their voice. And it's through their eyes that I will make my budget comments tonight.

When I think about this budget and its impact on people in

Saskatchewan and in Saskatoon Riversdale, I feel like I've found a suitable framework for assessing this budget in the form of a quote from 1977, Mr. Speaker, by United States vice-president, Hubert Humphrey, Mr. Speaker. He said:

The moral test of a government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.

Although there are many government, many government decisions in this budget that leave it open to harsh critique, my allotted time to respond to this budget is brief, only about 20 minutes, Mr. Speaker. I'll do my best to use vice-president Humphrey's quote as a template for covering off some of the most harmful and mean parts of this budget from my perspective as the Health and seniors critic and as someone who represents an incredibly socio-economically diverse constituency. Undoubtedly there will be things that I miss in this budget speech, but I look forward to getting down to estimates in a couple weeks time and asking many questions of the Health minister.

So just for some context, in general terms this is a budget that increases fees and taxes for Saskatchewan citizens by almost a billion dollars, including adding taxes to things like kids' diapers, Mr. Speaker, all the while putting . . . And you'd know that well, Mr. Speaker, as a father of, is it two children now? Two children. You know those diapers are not cheap. All the while putting money in the pockets of both corporations and well-connected citizens, Mr. Speaker. It's a budget that tells you exactly where the Sask Party priorities are.

It's a budget that sees the province's debt double since 2013 from \$9 billion to \$18 billion, and that debt is expected to grow even further to \$22 billion by the end of this government's term. And the Sask Party, by the time they have finished this third term, have projected to run more deficits than balanced budgets, Mr. Speaker, in our sunniest of times, after draining down our rainy day fund and not saving a single cent, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at their jobs record, 40,000 people are looking for work today, Mr. Speaker, 20,000 more than when this government came to power. This is a government that has cut more than 500 jobs just in the last couple of weeks, Mr. Speaker. They're cutting STC jobs; janitorial staff, folks who work here in this building; folks who work with those who have gambling issues, Mr. Speaker. And there are more to come. You can't cut 3.5 per cent of your civil service and not anticipate more job cuts, Mr. Speaker. Mark my words, those job cuts are coming.

There's programs that I will speak about tonight. We don't have numbers yet, but there are jobs that are being lost in many of these areas, Mr. Speaker. This record, I would argue, is not the hallmark of a government that has the backs of average people here in our province.

I've heard both the Finance minister and the Premier talk about the new norm around our natural resource revenues, Mr. Speaker. This would be laughable if it wasn't so sad. I've had

the opportunity . . . the MLA who I followed, Mr. Speaker, Premier Calvert, talked about the time where \$50 a barrel oil was fantasy, Mr. Speaker. Never did they think that oil would ever reach \$50 barrel. They worked with much less, Mr. Speaker.

And so for this government, for its previous two terms, to think that natural resource revenues just keep on rolling in and they're going to keep on rolling in at \$110 a barrel, was not a prudent and fiscally responsible government, Mr. Speaker. So for the Premier to talk about the new norm, well I would encourage him to look back at the history of the province and look at what natural resource revenues do over time, Mr. Speaker.

So I just want to get back to the first part of vice-president Humphrey's quote where he talks about "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children." So how is the Sask Party government meeting that test? I think the evidence shows that this government should get a fail on this front. When it comes to children, these are some of the Sask Party choices.

So over the next year, Mr. Speaker, they will be cutting \$54 million from our kids' classrooms over the next bit of time, Mr. Speaker. I encourage the members opposite to talk to teachers and parents across the province. They will tell you about crowded classrooms, particularly in the urban centres. They'll talk about the lack of resources to support English as an additional language for our new arrivals, making it hard on both those new students and the rest of the classroom. They'll talk to you about cuts to educational assistants, again placing challenges on the entire class, Mr. Speaker. This is already the reality now. Those things are the reality now. A \$54 million funding decrease will hurt students; there is no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker.

This government brags. I don't think right now is the time for a bragfest, any time in this last week or, actually quite honestly, any time in this last year, Mr. Speaker, should have been time for a bragfest, but this government likes to brag about its new schools. New schools are important, as is the need for maintenance of our existing and older schools, especially when our schools are crumbling and roofs are being held up with teleposts, Mr. Speaker. But the happiness of a new school is lost if school boards are struggling with finances to be able to staff them properly, Mr. Speaker. It's great to have a new building, but if you can't afford to staff them properly it doesn't do anybody any favours, Mr. Speaker.

So how else is this government treating children, Mr. Speaker? I want to point to Health, a cut from the Health line item, the Health line item, Mr. Speaker. I just have to, my colleagues are very exuberant here tonight, Mr. Speaker, and it's hard for me not to listen to their conversation, but I just need to take a moment to talk a little bit about some things going on in Health. In 1991 there was a parent piloting, a parent project, a parent mentoring program, Mr. Speaker, and that became a permanent program.

So a program that started in 1991 cost \$1.4 million, Mr. Speaker, and was in 11 of 12 health regions, a parent mentoring program, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to tell you a little bit about it:

The objectives of the parent mentoring program of Saskatchewan [which is offered through public health] are to provide knowledge, skills and motivation to parents to think, do, feel, and be the best they can be in their roles as parents. Our objectives include having a mutually satisfying relationship between parent and volunteer, and encouraging parents to access other community programs and services that meet their needs. The overall outcome of meeting the objective is healthier, happier parents with healthier, happier children.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that when I first became a mom — actually both times I had my kids — parenting is really difficult, Mr. Speaker. I have a huge support network. I had a partner and I had resources available to me, and parenting was still challenging. I would argue that all parents are vulnerable at any time in that cycle of parenting, Mr. Speaker, but there are some families due to poverty, due to addictions, to all kinds of reasons — the legacy of residential school, Mr. Speaker — that some parents are even more vulnerable than others. And this was a program, a \$1.4 million program that helped support those vulnerable families, Mr. Speaker. And that program is gone, Mr. Speaker, so that's what this government thinks of children here, Mr. Speaker.

So I think it's important to talk about child care. So after a few years of not opening any child care spaces, some new schools are coming online, Mr. Speaker, and new child care spaces will be opening. But I would argue that the government is going to have a serious challenge staffing those spaces, Mr. Speaker. They've put extreme pressure on professional child care workers, Mr. Speaker, on early learning and care educators. They haven't made child care more affordable for parents, in fact quite the opposite. So the turning point, the point at which you no longer receive the maximum subsidy, Mr. Speaker, has not changed since 1982. And there are many governments who own the responsibility for that one, but this is a government that had record revenue, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague from Regina Lakeview has brought forward a petition pointing to the need for tax exemptions for child care centres. That's because child care centres are being starved, Mr. Speaker. They can only raise parent rates or parent fees by so much, Mr. Speaker. The money that they get from this government to ensure that high-quality, licensed child care spaces are available to children does not meet the needs of being able to properly fund child care centres, Mr. Speaker.

Child care is, after housing, for those who have young children it's the second-largest expense of most families, Mr. Speaker. This government has not done the work in supporting and the building of a strong child care field. There are many wonderful people who are child care, early learning and care educators, Mr. Speaker, but this government has not done the work to support that workforce. Many of those people joined the field, Mr. Speaker, and then realized that they could make more money working at Walmart, so they leave the profession, Mr. Speaker. So this government has not done well in supporting child care, Mr. Speaker.

The exemption for PST on children's clothes, on diapers, Mr. Speaker. I was shopping, actually I went shoe shopping for Ophelia on Saturday, and I was amazed at how many parents

were also out shopping for clothing and shoes, trying to beat the 6 per cent increase. That will have an impact on families, Mr. Speaker, and families . . . A consumption tax like PST has the biggest impact, Mr. Speaker, on lower income earners, Mr. Speaker. It's a greater percentage of their disposable income.

How else is this government treating our children? Let's talk about our slightly older children, our young adults like my 19-year-old Hennessey who's at university. There's a 5 per cent cut to universities. That will have an impact. That will have an impact on tuition and it will possibly lead to program cuts, Mr. Speaker.

This is a government who's cut NORTEP [northern teacher education program] and NORPAC [Northern Professional Access College] without consultation, ignoring 40 years of success in training teachers in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Forty years of success training close to 500 teachers, Mr. Speaker, who work in the North. They have trouble with recruitment and retention when teachers come from the South, Mr. Speaker. This is a government who has failed those citizens, Mr. Speaker, in northern Saskatchewan.

I'd like to talk a little bit about vice-president Humphrey's quote, the moral test when it comes to the elderly or seniors, those folks who are in the twilight of their life. How has this government and this budget treated those citizens, Mr. Speaker?

We can talk about long-term care, Mr. Speaker. This government is raising long-term care fees. So this has been a government who has had a huge challenge in long-term care. They've starved the front lines. You look at the ratio of workers to residents, Mr. Speaker, and it is abysmal. Their own CEO [chief executive officer] tours show that over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker.

So they continue to not put in place the resources our loved ones, the frail elderly as the former minister of Health used to talk about, which is only a small percentage of our population. But nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, just because they're a small percentage of our population doesn't mean they're not worthy and deserving of dignity in their final days, Mr. Speaker.

So what is this government choosing to do? They're choosing to raise those long-term care rates. So the current minimum fee on a portion of income is going up from \$1,086 and 50 per cent of income to \$1,086 and 57.5 per cent of income . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Wonder what the former Health minister is so interested in talking about here, Mr. Speaker? He should be concerned about the diaper fee, Mr. Speaker, as someone who has a second child. He should be very concerned about those kinds of costs as well.

Back to seniors here, Mr. Speaker. So the maximum monthly fee in long-term care is moving from \$2,065 to \$2,689, Mr. Speaker. That is more than \$600 for the maximum fee, Mr. Speaker. This will impact some of our most vulnerable citizens, Mr. Speaker. And we're pushing a fee onto the people who built this province quite frankly, Mr. Speaker.

Not only are they not getting the care they need, not because the workers don't want to do a really great job and don't come to their job every day as committed as they possibly can be, but

because there are not enough of them. And they are run off their feet, Mr. Speaker. So that's part of what this government is . . . that moral test of a government, Mr. Speaker.

Government is cutting the podiatry department that offers podiatry services to residents, Mr. Speaker. That will have an impact, actually not just on seniors.

The audiology program . . . actually it's interesting. The audiology program, it is being completely cut. In recent years, Mr. Speaker, as the Health critic I've written to the Minister of Health about this, and I'd felt I'd heard from many citizens who felt like the audiology program was being starved. I'd heard about long wait-lists and having trouble getting phone calls back. But they had felt, the people with whom I'd worked and communicated with the minister, felt that this government was starving the audiology department to cut it, Mr. Speaker.

[19:45]

And you know what? Back in October they did in fact, in the Saskatoon Health Region, have to eliminate . . . They eliminated two audiology positions, one which was the only position in Prince Albert that was publicly funded, Mr. Speaker, and the one position in Saskatoon. The wait-list would be impacted.

So who does this impact, Mr. Speaker? The most marginalized of citizens. I'm thinking about seniors here, but it's not just seniors. It's not just seniors who need audiology services. So who does this impact the most? The lowest of income and the most marginalized of citizens who don't have money to access private services, Mr. Speaker. So audiology exams, we can talk about . . . This is a cut that isn't just about seniors, but it has an impact on seniors.

Libraries, Mr. Speaker, I will talk a little bit about how libraries impact both seniors and other folks. But when we think about libraries . . . So this government is cutting completely the funding to libraries in both Saskatoon and Regina, and I understand about 50 per cent of the budgets in regional libraries, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, libraries aren't just about books. I heard the Minister of Education today talk about how lending of materials is down or borrowing of materials is down, but I'm wondering if he's set foot in a library in recent days or recent years, Mr. Speaker. You walk in the door. You've got banks of computers, Mr. Speaker — I'm thinking about the Saskatoon Public Library; the one that I visit most often is Frances Morrison — but a bank of computers where you've got people who don't have money for computers, who don't have money for Internet, who are using those services to look for jobs, to look for housing. You've got newcomers who come and use those computers to connect with loved ones far away. Those newcomers come to the library. And what do they do, Mr. Speaker? They read books to improve their English as an additional language.

Young people, the programming, they're in — again at the Frances Morrison library in Saskatoon — Pooh Corner, for . . . which is different than the Leader of the Opposition was telling me about his backyard where his dog visits, Mr. Speaker.

Winnie the Pooh and Pooh Corner is an important part of the programming at the Saskatoon Public Library, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition misunderstood me when we had a conversation about this earlier. But Saturday mornings at Pooh Corner is packed. You come sit in there with your kids and the librarian engages kids and their caregivers.

And it's not just about kids. There's always programming going on at the public libraries. They're meeting places. I remember being a new mom actually, Mr. Speaker, and that's actually where . . . Many libraries have little play areas, and it was affordable to go and be able to hang out with your friends, with the other new moms or parents you've connected with, and take out some books and visit.

But you know, it was interesting to me. Last spring I had an opportunity to participate in a fundraiser, a homelessness challenge. And by no means was I thinking I was homeless, but we had a day and a half where we were to not have access to services. And you know, that was a really important place. That's where we all ended up to go look for housing, Mr. Speaker. To look for housing, that was one of our challenges, to look at job opportunities. Those are places for marginalized people also to go and have access to services they won't otherwise have, Mr. Speaker.

There are many good reasons to support libraries, Mr. Speaker, and this government apparently doesn't get that. Seniors, Mr. Speaker, seniors — it's a place where seniors go too. The bus, actually the bus mall . . . thinking I'm very Saskatoon-centric here, Mr. Speaker, but these lessons can be applied, I think, much broader as well, Mr. Speaker. I'm thinking again about the Frances Morrison library where a block away is the bus mall, so that's what many seniors do for outings as well. So I'm still speaking of seniors in the twilight of their life and how the government is impacting.

The cut to STC, Mr. Speaker, is a big deal, Mr. Speaker, on so many levels. I've talked about children and seniors already, Mr. Speaker, children and seniors. How will STC . . . And then I will also talk about the more vulnerable . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Mr. Speaker, I'm really, really grateful for all the support from my colleagues. They've got lots of important things to say, Mr. Speaker, but sometimes it's hard not to get drawn into that conversation, Mr. Speaker.

So what does STC do when we think about children, our older children, when we think about seniors, when we think about the more vulnerable, which I'll also talk about here in a moment. It connects people to education. I'm thinking about kids traveling from rural Saskatchewan into the city or into other communities, smaller centres, for post-secondary education, whether it's a regional college or a university, anything like that, Mr. Speaker. It connects people to jobs. It connects people to farms, Mr. Speaker. It connects people to health care.

We heard last week about 300 cancer patients from around the province who use STC to get to Regina and Saskatoon for treatments. We know, Mr. Speaker, that blood products, STC transports blood products across the province. Rabies samples, that might be something the members opposite don't realize, but STC actually from rural and remote communities will transport rabies samples into the city for testing, Mr. Speaker.

It was interesting when the minister last week responsible for STC had made the point that only 253 communities are serviced by STC. There's over 500 communities in the province and those people in those other communities, they also have people with cancer that have to make it into the city for treatments and they found other options without much problem. Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that minister realized their other option was often getting to the community where there was an STC line, Mr. Speaker.

There was a cancer patient last week who talked quite eloquently about independence, about cost, that it's far cheaper to have . . . I believe the bus pass is, the medical bus pass is about \$60, Mr. Speaker. I might be off by about \$10 there but I believe it's about \$60 for the medical bus pass, which by the way about 1,200 people had in the last statistics that we have, in 2015 I believe. And that number had been going up over the years, Mr. Speaker, so 1,200 medical passes in 2015.

So people are using STC for health care. I know that. I had an opportunity this past fall to do a health care tour in rural Saskatchewan to talk about this government's decision to move from 12 regions to one health region, Mr. Speaker, which people aren't very happy about by the way. But I heard a lot about how people really rely on STC to get them to medical appointments, so it's a huge hit.

So this is an indication of about how this government treats seniors, young people, the most vulnerable who don't have any other way of getting around, Mr. Speaker. This is what this government thinks about those citizens, not to mention all those people who are now without a job. More than 200 people, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's about 240 people who have worked for STC who will be joining the ranks of those fellow 40,000 people who are without jobs in a very tough time to find jobs, Mr. Speaker. This is a big hit to so many on so many levels.

And I think it's important to point out that one of the cancer patients who uses STC to get to her appointments talked about STC being an essential service for people living in smaller communities. I think it's important to point out that actually this government thought that STC was an essential service just a few years ago as well, and deemed it as such. And now they think that they should wind it down — which is just code, Mr. Speaker, for privatizing it.

So they had . . . This is a government who is breaking its commitments. The minister responsible, less than a year ago, said STC wasn't on the chopping block. We had an election not that long ago, Mr. Speaker, and not once did I hear the members opposite talk about cutting STC, despite the fact we have a Crown protection Act, Mr. Speaker. That STC not once, not . . . I don't know if anybody else did either but . . . yes, not once, not once, Mr. Speaker. And we have a Crown protection Act, a piece of legislation that would require the government to go to the people of Saskatchewan if they wanted to privatize STC. But again, much like Bill 40, they're trying to do by . . . not just trying, they are doing by the back door what they can't do by the front door, Mr. Speaker. That is not fair and that is not right.

My colleagues in the back have lots of things to say tonight.

When we speak about vice-president Humphrey's quote around

the moral test of a government is how it treats the most vulnerable — the sick, the needy, the handicapped, Mr. Speaker — the one thing that jumps out at me is the funeral cut, Mr. Speaker. On social services you will now be entitled to have the simplest of caskets or a cremation but not a funeral service, Mr. Speaker. And for those who've never been on social assistance, even the most modest service, anybody who has buried a loved one knows, can be quite costly. But not only do people on social assistance not have the dignity in life that we all deserve as citizens of this province, but they're not even allowed that dignity in death, Mr. Speaker.

An acquaintance of mine, her daughter, she has been adopted. This little girl has been adopted and her mother and father both had challenges with addictions and had a very challenging life, hence the reason their little girl ended up adopted, Mr. Speaker. But last year this little girl's biological father passed away and she had an opportunity . . . Social Services paid for the funeral of her father. And she didn't know her dad, Mr. Speaker, but she had an opportunity to attend that funeral, say goodbye to her biological dad, and see that there were people in the world, despite her father's challenges, who loved her dad, Mr. Speaker. That was a really important thing for that little girl to experience. And now with this cut to funerals that won't . . . If this cut would've happened a year ago, Mr. Speaker, that little girl would not have had that opportunity to feel a bit better about her dad, Mr. Speaker.

Cuts to pastoral care, a \$1.5 million cut to pastoral care in hospitals. So hospitals are losing the spiritual and emotional support that they provide to patients, Mr. Speaker. So just taking you to the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region:

Spiritual Care is all about Caring for the Human Spirit. The human spirit is that part of every person seeking meaning, purpose, hope, and love.

In times of illness, trauma and loss, a person's beliefs, values, and feelings are important aspects of their healthcare. Within the Regina Qu'Appelle . . . Region a Chaplain is a Spiritual Care professional who is a member of your healthcare team.

Chaplains:

- Listen to your fears, concerns, and needs;
- Help you identify who or what is important to you;
- Help you identify what you believe;
- Help you ask your own questions and help you find your own answers; and
- If you want, can link you with your own religious or spiritual community

Mr. Speaker, the pastoral program works with people who are sick and dying themselves, or their families, and even help in planning funerals, Mr. Speaker.

I want to read you a couple quotes that people responded to this cut, Mr. Speaker. "Something so simple that can mean so much to patients and families at a time when they have enough going on." Another quote: "Those who don't see the value in these services have never seen a loved one find peace in their final hour."

I had an opportunity to chat with a fellow who was so grateful for pastoral care that his father received in his dying days. He'd been ill for some time, and this Anglican priest actually, who liked to be called Father Phil — he was an Anglican priest; that's what he liked to go by — Father Phil actually happened to be a Vietnam War veteran and a former pilot. And this fellow's father was also a pilot who never saw action. He was in the military in the 1950s and had done all the training exercises.

In his final days he had built quite a rapport with this Anglican priest, who spent the last couple hours of his life also sitting next to him and talking about their shared interest around planes and being in the service. And his father . . . He was grateful to this Anglican priest for giving his father some pleasure in his final few hours, Mr. Speaker. And he actually got quite choked up, this fellow who was telling me about the important impact of pastoral care, got quite choked up talking about his dad, Mr. Speaker.

How else does this government treat vulnerable people? Cuts to chiropractic care. This government, a few years ago, delisted chiropractic services for most people, but kept 12 appointments a year for those who were on social assistance, Mr. Speaker. Many people would argue chiropractic care is about preventative health, Mr. Speaker, and saves money to the system if you can keep people healthy, Mr. Speaker. But this government is cutting those 12, last 12 remaining funded chiropractic treatments, Mr. Speaker.

[20:00]

Mental health and addictions. When we talk about the most vulnerable, this is a big part of it, how this government has treated the most vulnerable, Mr. Speaker. We have a mental health and addictions action plan of about two years ago that has seen very little action, Mr. Speaker.

And it's interesting to me, it's interesting to me that this government recently negotiated a health care accord with the feds, and a big part of that is \$16 million a year coming for targeted mental health support, Mr. Speaker. But there wasn't a word about that in the budget. So apparently this is a high priority item for the government, but there was not a word in the budget about mental health and addictions, Mr. Speaker, which when I think about that, when we . . .

Mental health and addictions in general, I think, deserves a little bit of mention, but the fact that we have children — children, Mr. Speaker — who are choosing to take their lives in communities in Saskatchewan, I think recognizing that \$16 million we're getting from the federal government and thinking about it being a supposed priority of the government, you think it would have turned up in their action plan or in their budget, Mr. Speaker.

There are many other places. I'm getting the signal that my time is just about up here, Mr. Speaker, which is always a shame. I have much to say and I know they're anxious to hear all the things that I have to say. But I can talk about . . . I represent a constituency that has a good chunk of the Meewasin Valley in it, Mr. Speaker. And this cut to Meewasin, more than \$400,000 and actually removing the statutory requirement for funding, that has me very concerned. Not only does the cut have me

concerned this year, but them getting rid of the statutory funding means that it'll be much easier for them to cut down the road, Mr. Speaker.

And the Meewasin Valley, anybody who lives in Saskatoon, who has ever visited Saskatoon, knows the benefit of conservation and riverbank stewardship, that the Meewasin Valley is a gathering place. You only need to take a walk out on a summer night and see the hundreds and hundreds of people strolling along the river valley, Mr. Speaker. Take a canoe down the river and see the wildlife. As I said, I live right on the river valley, Mr. Speaker, and I . . . There was a coyote friend hanging out not far from my house, Mr. Speaker, on the river valley. And it's a shame that this government is off-loading that expense completely on, or taking a good chunk of the money away from the Meewasin.

The grants in lieu of taxes, this will be a \$36 million hit to our municipalities, Mr. Speaker. So that's where SaskPower and SaskEnergy used to give grants to our municipalities because they don't pay property tax. I believe it's about an \$8 million hit to the city of Saskatoon that will have an impact that's . . . Our cities will either have to raise taxes or decrease services, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge issue.

There were many, many things that weren't in this budget. I didn't see any words about reconciliation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and any calls to action and how we were going to meet those calls to action, Mr. Speaker. I didn't see any money to fully cover HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] drugs, which the Minister of Health said he'd consider doing just a few weeks ago.

What else is missing? Not a peep about organ donation. This government, the Minister of Health, called a committee on looking at how to improve organ donation, Mr. Speaker. The committee developed some recommendations. The Premier decided to go rogue and do his own thing, but we didn't see a single word about how we were going to bring those recommendations to life and improve organ donation rates here in Saskatchewan.

There was no money for long-term care in La Ronge, no money for Victoria Hospital in P.A. [Prince Albert], no money for the hospital in Weyburn, Mr. Speaker, who I know has done a lot of work in raising some of their own money.

What was in the budget though were tax increases on average folks and families, and job losses, more than 500 and more to come, Mr. Speaker. Those job losses are people who spend money in their communities and will have less money to spend.

So if you look at vice-president Humphrey's moral test of government, his quote, it is a mean budget and not a smart budget. These choices this government has made will hurt people and it will hurt job creation. I will be supporting the amendment, and I cannot support this budget, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Buckingham: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy today to stand and support the budget of our Finance minister

that he presented here on March 22nd. But before I get into the budget reply, I have some people I'd like to thank.

I want to thank my very supportive wife Karen, who is always by my side at the many events I am proud to attend on behalf of this government. I also want to thank the Finance minister and his officials for their hard work in providing a clear path for our province in this budget. And I also want to thank my constituency assistant, Sasha Peters, who is always diligent in completing the tasks that are required and always is more than pleased to help constituents in a polite and meaningful demeanour.

The theme meeting the challenge is an appropriate one for this year's budget, but really, Mr. Speaker, it should be the theme for every budget. We always have challenges and we always should have.

Saskatchewan has grown by 160,000 people in the last decade and it's the second fastest growing province in Canada with a population of 1.15 million. This has put pressure on Saskatchewan's infrastructure that we have consistently invested in. Because of a larger population, we have to meet the challenge by recruiting more doctors, nurses, and teachers to keep Saskatchewan growing. Mr. Speaker, we have 3,000 more nurses and 750 more doctors, and this is in stark contrast to the NDP, who lost 450 nurses and 173 doctors between 2001 and 2006.

Saskatchewan now has among the shortest wait times in Canada and while when the NDP was in power, they had the worst surgical wait times in Canada.

Since Saskatchewan became a province, we have had challenges to overcome. However, not every government in our history has had the challenge or the courage to move our province forward. This budget clearly provides a path for us to get back to balance in three years. The challenge is clear, Mr. Speaker. With resource revenues significantly dropping for the last three years, it's time to set a new course to respond to this current challenge.

It's been three years now with resource revenues significantly lower than anyone would've expected. Now it has become clear that we need to change in direction with respect to how we tax our economy. A shift away from dependence on resource revenues by modernizing and expanding the tax system, along with controlling and reducing government spending, will ensure our economy remains strong, and this strategy will return us to balance in three years.

We must have a vision for the future of our province and some will not see it until they look back years later. Consider this beautiful building, Mr. Speaker, and the vision our first premier, Walter Scott, had for this city and our province. Consider that Premier Scott was criticized for building the most venerable legislative building, and it was so far from downtown Regina and south of the Wascana Creek. I can't imagine when I look at this breathtaking building being anywhere else in Regina. He had a vision that I don't think anyone would challenge today. This palace of the prairies has been the centre of our highs and lows as a province, enduring a cyclone, a drought, the Great Depression, and demonstrations, all the while remaining the

go-to place to celebrate royal visits, Grey Cups, Canada Day, and weddings — lots of weddings. You might say Walter Scott had no trouble meeting the challenge. But he would not have accomplished his vision if he had focused on the naysayers.

The challenge Saskatchewan is facing is that since 2014-15 resource revenue has declined by more than a billion dollars, and tax revenue is down by hundreds of millions due to the resource sector slowdown. The population has grown by 160,000 in the last decade which has put pressure on vital services. But every place we see the challenge of growth, we see the examples where our government has met the challenge. This year we are forecasting a deficit of 685 million and a smaller deficit of 304 million in '18-19 with a return to balance in '19-20 with a forecasted surplus of 15 million.

Through careful debt management, since forming government in 2007, Saskatchewan has the second-lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in Canada. This plan to get the balance and control debt is a challenge that we have met to make sure that future generations are not burdened with reckless spending.

Mr. Speaker, while we have a plan to balance, we see that our government will continue to invest in health, education, and social services and assistance is up nearly 72 per cent or 4.4 billion. This year, funding in these three areas is 10.6 billion, nearly 1.4 billion in the area of social services and assistance, a 51 per cent increase since 2007-08. Twelve million for overcapacity in ER [emergency room] wait times in Regina and Saskatoon, 3.7 billion for schools, highways, bridges, hospitals, and Crown infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, our government acknowledges that the budget needs to balance restraint with strategic investment. That is why we are trying to control and reduce government spending in this budget. We said we would take a wage rollback before we asked anyone else to do the same, and we will be reducing MLAs' wages by 3.5 per cent for all MLAs and ministers.

We'll also be consolidating the current 12 regional health regions into one with potential saving of between 10 to 20 million in 2018. Total health care spending will be held to a point seven per cent increase. And we made the tough decision to wind down STC and executive air service.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan's economy is poised for growth in 2017. Commodity prices including oil are forecast to rise slightly and drilling activity is expected to strengthen. Even though the global economy is not as strong as I think we would all like it to be, there are signs that it is starting to strengthen, which is helpful to Saskatchewan's export-based economy.

Saskatchewan's unemployment rate is among the lowest in Canada. Manufacturing sales were up 11.9 per cent in December to 1.3 billion year-over-year, representing the second-highest growth among provinces in 2016.

Investment in non-residential building construction reached 1.9 billion, up by 9.6 per cent, and again was the second strongest in the country last year.

Mr. Speaker, recently the Fraser Institute named Saskatchewan the best place in the world to invest in mining, which is up one

spot from last year. Over the past decade, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has created a business investment climate that is the envy of the country by continuing to reduce corporate taxes and will be an even more attractive province to invest in.

Total capital investment in Saskatchewan has grown from 8.3 billion in 2007 to a peak of 20 billion in 2014, with a strong forecast of 14.5 billion for 2017.

Mr. Speaker, meeting the challenge requires changes in the delivery of services to make it more streamlined, efficient, and customer-focused, while at the same time cost-effective. These transformational changes can be complex and require time to successfully implement, and our government will continue to work with stakeholders across all sectors to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people.

Government's investments into income assistance programs designed to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens have improved dramatically over the past 10 years, but they have become unnecessarily complex. A redesign of income assistance programs is currently under way, a transformational change that will make programs simpler for clients and workers, focusing on providing effective support to the most vulnerable in our society while ensuring programs are sustainable into the future.

Mr. Speaker, this last year the governance panel undertook some very extensive consultation in meetings all across this province. What they found was that there was a lot of support for maintaining the same amount of school divisions and keeping elected boards.

Also new in this budget, Mr. Speaker, is a transparent post-secondary student loan program that will help students obtain, starting in August, loans to access upfront student loans to those who need it the most. This new system will help students know up front how much they can expect to receive in grants and how much they will need to borrow for their education. Mr. Speaker, when you combine that with the Saskatchewan scholarship program and federal grants, the new system will cover most, if not all in some cases, of a lower income undergraduate student's tuition cost.

[20:15]

These are just a few of the transformational changes being undertaken across government, which is aimed at delivering vital services to Saskatchewan people while exploring new ways to do new things and address challenges.

In Education we have built 40 brand new or replacement schools and have completed 25 major school renovations, and this is in comparison to the NDP, where they closed 176 schools and the number of teachers dropped by 400. I have one of those brand new schools in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, and I toured it last weekend and it is a beautiful school.

Mr. Speaker, we have also invested in post-secondary institutions by increasing funding by 40 per cent over 10 years, which is significantly more than the NDP, who increased funding by 20 per cent in 16 years, which is just over 1 per cent per year.

Mr. Speaker, this government has a strong record on tax reductions, providing some of the largest tax reductions in Saskatchewan's history. Personal and corporate income tax in this budget are being reduced, which will keep life affordable while supporting growth. And in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the patent box initiative will further reduce the corporate income tax rate for companies that use their intellectual property to create jobs and new investment.

The research and development grant is being reformed to better target small and medium-sized companies. As well, the oil processing investment incentive encourages processing of our oil resources within the province, with royalty credits on new production.

Mr. Speaker, shifting away from income and productivity to consumption helps to improve the economy and improves government's revenue stability. Changes will generate consistent revenue to pay for the valued services we all might need from time to time, such as health care, education, and social services.

It will also provide much-needed capital for schools, hospitals, and roads. These changes will create a more stable revenue base to provide these services and provide and keep vital services sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, when changes are fully implemented, Saskatchewan will have the lowest corporate income tax rate and the lowest tax rate on manufacturing and processing and among the lowest income tax rates in the country. This will be a great Saskatchewan advantage for businesses to invest and expand in our province.

Mr. Speaker, one of the largest expenses to government is compensation to the public sector. That expense is 7 billion annually and this represents the largest single expense to government. Given the fiscal challenges we are facing, this budget is planned for a reduction in total public sector spending of 250 million or 3.5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, the Premier announced that effective April 1st, all MLAs will take a 3.5 per cent wage rollback and staff in the Premier's office, caucus office, and ministers' office will take nine unpaid days off which is the equivalent of 3.5 per cent.

Another change, Mr. Speaker, is that STC will be wound down as ridership continues to fall, while expenses and the dependence on subsidies continue to rise. Since 2007 the cost to subsidize STC has been 112 million. The cost per person to subsidize riders was \$25 back in 2007 and now it is \$94 today. If STC were to continue to operate, it would cost another 85 million in the next four years. Last year saw 77 per cent lower riders than STC in its busiest year and unfortunately is not sustainable when increasing subsidies are weighed against other spending priorities in the province such as health care and education. This was a tough decision, but a decision that needed to be made.

Executive air is also winding down as it is declining similarly by more than 73 per cent and, given the challenging financial times, this should save taxpayers between 700,000 and 1 million.

Since 2007 total investment into three priority areas — health, education, and social services and assistance — has increased by 72 per cent or 4.4 billion. These three areas make up nearly three quarters of government's total expenses and are projected to be a combined 10.6 billion in 2017-18, up 107 million or about 1 per cent since last year.

In 2017-18, total spending for health care is expected to be 5.6 billion, an increase of over 39 million over last year. This includes spending through the Ministry of Health, the regional health authorities, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, eHealth, the Health Quality Council, 3sHealth, and the Physician Recruitment Agency. Overall expense for health has grown by 55 per cent over the last decade, from 3.6 billion in 2007-8 to 5.6 billion in forecasts for this year.

Total education expense this year is budgeted at 3.6 billion, down 45.1 million or 1.2 per cent from last year. This includes budgeted spending through the ministries of Advanced Education, Education, and Economy, and the board of education, Sask Polytechnic, regional colleges, the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, and the Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund.

Although we do see a small decrease, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that since 2007-08 the budget for education, which includes both the pre-kindergarten to grade 12 and post-secondary sectors, has experienced a 100 per cent increase from 1.8 billion to its current 3.6 billion. Saskatchewan's 28 school divisions will receive 1.9 billion in school operating funding.

While this represents a slight reduction, it represents significant financial support for classrooms and is a huge improvement when compared to the previous government's record. This represents a financial challenge facing the province but also the opportunity to seek improvements through innovation and change. Significant investment in post-secondary education continues in this budget, including student support and the continuation of the student retention program, providing up to 20,000 income tax credits to graduates who live and work in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this budget provides strong supports for Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions, with 649 million in operating and capital funding. However, a 5 per cent reduction in base operating grants to universities, technical institutes, and regional colleges will be part of meeting the province's fiscal challenges.

Mr. Speaker, this budget includes 3.7 billion for investment in Saskatchewan's infrastructure. The commercial Crown sector is investing 1.6 billion, and 1.6 billion is being invested by executive government ministries and agencies. Solid capital investment will help Saskatchewan meet the challenge of a growing province and strengthen the economy now and moving forward. Capital projects lead to construction jobs at a time when oil and gas are recovering from commodity price downturns.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is another important tax conversation that needs to be discussed. Unlike the members opposite and every jurisdiction in the country, Saskatchewan will not implement a carbon tax. In a province like Saskatchewan such a

tax would disproportionately affect key drivers of growth. When companies look for places to invest, they look for predictable and competitive tax and royalty regimes. Saskatchewan, by not implementing a carbon tax, keeps us competitive. This is unlike the members opposite who have either come right out and supported such a system or seem to be eerily quiet when asked about whether they support or don't support it.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to the oil and gas industry, the budget sees significant enhancement to the regulatory oversight. The petroleum and natural gas divisions of the Ministry of the Economy, which is the regulator of the oil and gas activities, will receive an additional 1.4 million and 13 full-time equivalent positions in the 2017-18 budget.

This budget will address the following initiatives: \$600,000 start-up funding for a multi-year pipeline regulation enhancement program to strengthen Saskatchewan's approach to pipeline regulation; there will be 500,000 in core funding to increase the number of field inspectors in the ministry's offices in Estevan, Swift Current, Kindersley, and Lloydminster; and 250,000 funding to expand the technical capacity of the ministry to support the government's commitment to Saskatchewan's climate change related to the oil and gas industry.

The budget also includes 460,000 in capital spending to begin the expansion of the integrated resource information system to support the implementation of the pipeline regulation enhancement program. This funding will allow for web-based pipeline licensing including flow lines as well as additional reporting and mapping capabilities related to pipeline regulation.

Mr. Speaker, all these investments outlined in the budget will help keep Saskatchewan strong and provide a promising future for generations to come, and continue to keep our economy strong despite having less revenues from the resource sector. Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget presented by the Finance minister and will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise in support of the motion brought forward by our member from Regina Northeast, and I also want to acknowledge the seconder, my colleague, the member from Moosomin.

There's a lot of things I want to talk about in this budget, Mr. Speaker, but first of all there's some people I'd . . . Like all the colleagues here, I have some people that I have to thank first and foremost. First and foremost my wife, Lois, who has been by my side through all the years of what I've been doing in my career in promoting and working for rural Saskatchewan. And I think that is something that I really have to acknowledge, is the sacrifice that she has made while I've been gone away from home, not only in raising our two children but also running a business of her own.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my children: our daughter Katie who lives here in the city of Regina with her husband, Darrel, and two lovely granddaughters that they've blessed us with in Lily and Olivia, and she works here in the city of Regina as a social worker. And our son Jordan who is finishing up his fellowship as a doctor in Alberta right now, finishing his fellowship and hoping to return to the province of Saskatchewan to practise medicine here in the province, and we're welcome for that.

But I also want to, if I could, Mr. Speaker, I have to echo the sentiments or the comments that my colleague from Martensville-Warman made in regards to a dear friend of mine and dear friend of hers also in Nithi Govindasamy, who is retiring as the deputy minister of Highways. And I've come to know Nithi since he came to this province in 2007 when he was asked by the minister, then minister of Agriculture, to come and work in the ministry as an ADM [associate deputy minister]. And in my previous life in working with SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities], our paths crossed quite regular and we engaged in a lot of projects together and we became very good friends. And Nithi will be truly missed within the Ministry of Highways. And I wish him well in his future endeavours and hopefully we'll have . . . our paths will cross.

Mr. Speaker, in my previous life and role as the president of SARM I had the privilege of working with great boards and great staff, and the experience that I gained there, Mr. Speaker, was phenomenal on infrastructure and what was happening in rural Saskatchewan. In my years in the executive of SARM which was a little over 10 years, I probably logged well in excess of 400,000 kilometres around the province of Saskatchewan, and of course many of those on the provincial highway system. So I was getting to know the province and getting to know rural Saskatchewan and the people that represented and worked for the ratepayers and for the people of rural Saskatchewan.

So if I can, Mr. Speaker, I do want to also touch on other people that have helped me within the constituency. Of course my constituency assistant Sandy Kuffner who has been just a real pillar in my constituency especially in light of my becoming a minister. She's running the office and handling it very well and setting up meetings for me when I get home on Fridays and she's done a phenomenal job. And I cannot help but recognize her and thank her for the work that she has done for me.

[20:30]

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will also thank many of the people in my constituency that helped with the election: my entire team; my business manager, my campaign manager who happened to be a husband and wife, Randy and Sandra Clark, who were great assets for me and working through the campaign; and all the others that helped out. Derek Tallon, who is the president of the constituency, is phenomenal in the work that he does on my behalf and for us in the Wood River constituency. But last and of course not least, Mr. Speaker, I really do have to thank the voters of Wood River constituency who have given me the honour and the privilege to serve in this Legislative Assembly on their behalf, and that is awful humbling of me to be able to represent them here, Mr. Speaker.

I now would like to touch on some things in the budget as many of my colleagues have, and obviously how do we meet the current economic challenges that we're facing here in the province of Saskatchewan. With resource revenue falling at \$1.3 billion since 2014, we've really had three years of revenue shortfall in the resource sector.

But despite the downturn, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worth mentioning, and I really must mention that over 3,500 new oil wells have been drilled in the province of Saskatchewan in 2015 and '16. And I think that's incredible when, at that time, oil prices were well below the current 47 or \$48 level they're at now. We saw oil prices well under 30. But I think it shows of the investment attraction and the environment that this province has created for the industry to grow and to flourish. And we're seeing that even today, when we hear the announcements of Crescent Point Energy investing huge dollars in oil exploration in the province of Saskatchewan.

And I did make a few phone calls to friends of mine in the southeast part of the province, talking to a good friend of mine not long ago. And at their council meetings, they are approving one or two oil well leases just about every month. And he said it's great to see the rigs moving around again, and they are doing what they can to accommodate them working that way. And we're seeing that all over the province, Mr. Speaker, where municipalities are working with the industry to make sure that they can continue to do the job and that we continue to see growth in the oil sector.

But what I really like about this budget, Mr. Speaker, is its fiscal responsibility. That's important to us and with a plan to balance. And I think that is . . . It has to be mentioned over and over again. I think it's predictable. It's fair. And hopefully in three years we're in a surplus situation.

And changes, of course, have started, and we as government have taken one of the very first changes when we of course are taking a three and a half per cent pay cut. And this side of the House has recognized that, and even our constituency assistants have seen the same and are taking those same measures as well. And I know the reduction doesn't seem like a lot, but it all adds up, and that reduction alone will be about a half a million dollars, Mr. Speaker. And all those half a million dollars will add up.

And another one that we've obviously looked at was exec air. And although we have reduced the executive air services by 73 per cent compared to the previous government, we have seen that it's time to wind down the service, and hopefully it will end up that we will save the taxpayers up to a million dollars annually. And I think it's ironic, Mr. Speaker, on budget day talking to private carriers that are very interested in the purchase and growing that industry within the province of Saskatchewan. I think that's very important news. And it's good news also for the city of Regina and the city of Saskatoon. So I think that's important.

I do want to touch briefly on education, but I'm sure there's a lot of my colleagues that will be touching on it. And I just want to just add a few things if I could, really within the budget on education.

And of course one of the big ones is with the announcement of 2.1 million for two more new schools in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, one for Rosthern and one for the city of Weyburn. And I think that's good news for the province of Saskatchewan to see new infrastructure going up to house the children and the growth that's happening in this province.

And it also provides 56 million to child care funding for 889 new child care spaces across the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. That is showing that we are having growth, and we're meeting the challenges around that. Since we have formed government, we have now built 40 new schools and hired more than 750 more teachers.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP like to talk. And what is their record? They closed 176 schools, and one of them was in my community, Mr. Speaker.

I'll touch briefly on health if I can, Mr. Speaker, while I have the opportunity. I'm glad that we decided to create a single provincial health authority. This is expected to save taxpayers between 10 and \$20 million through reduced administration. We believe the focus should be on front-line services, and we have now hired 750 new doctors. And hopefully, Mr. Speaker, in a couple years, if they can hire my son when he comes back, that would be good news. We'd make it 751 and hopefully more. And over 3,000 more nurses working in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP like to talk about actions in health, but what have they done? What did they do? They closed 52 rural hospitals, Mr. Speaker, and over a thousand hospital beds. They eliminated 1,200 long-term care beds between 2001 and 2006. The province lost nearly 1,200 health care workers. During the period, the province had lost 455 nurses and nearly 200 doctors, Mr. Speaker. And they presided over the longest surgical wait times in Canada.

If I could . . . I know the Minister of Agriculture gave a great presentation this afternoon that I thoroughly enjoyed. And I do want to talk about the importance of agriculture in the province of Saskatchewan. As we all know, it is a major industry here in the province of Saskatchewan.

But I want to talk a little bit about some of the things that I know my colleague from Moosomin had touched on. And I thought it was an incredible number when he mentioned 300, over 300 food processors in the province of Saskatchewan that employ over 5,000 people. I think that's an amazing accomplishment in the food sector, and how we have really grown the value-added processing here in the province of Saskatchewan. And that is important for growth and important for jobs, Mr. Speaker.

But I want to talk about the successful manufacturing operations that are here in the province of Saskatchewan that a lot of people don't talk about, and they really should, because this is a major industry in the . . . and something we should really very be proud of. I mean these companies are worldwide known, and I'm going to try and list a few, Mr. Speaker, because . . . And I know I'm going to leave some out because the list is long.

But you have Bourgault Industries right here in the province of Saskatchewan, a major manufacturer. Seed Hawk manufacturing, SeedMaster Manufacturing, Morris manufacturing. Degelman equipment, just north of the city of Regina. I was just north of the city the other day. I can't believe their lot is full of equipment where they've even . . . Now they're storing it across the highway; they've got so much. Their sales are so good.

Honey Bee Manufacturing down in Climax, or down in Bracken . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Frontier. Frontier. In Frontier, the Honey family, down in Frontier. I had the privilege a few years ago, the whole SARM board actually went down there, walked through that whole plant with Greg Honey. And it was a great experience on the amount of employees they have there, the new technologies they're bringing to the industry.

But Brandt Industries. We just heard Brandt Industries is taking over, you know, another major company here in the province. But their farm manufacturing here, but also their industrial equipment side of it. Case IH in Saskatoon with the manufacturing that they do there. These are all thriving in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and they employ thousands of people.

I haven't even got into the other sectors. We have Doepker Industries. We've got all kinds. We've got Schulte Industries. We've got Harmon Industries.

The list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker, that we should all be very proud of. But they do not get the recognition that they very well deserve for employing people. But not only that, Mr. Speaker, doing business in the province of Saskatchewan, staying here in the province of Saskatchewan and employing Saskatchewan people, paying Saskatchewan taxes and delivering their product around the world.

Mr. Speaker, this year, as you also know that we are funding 172 million for crop insurance premiums and program delivery, Mr. Speaker. We are fully funding our business risk management programs with an investment of 264.1 million or a 4 per cent increase.

And I know in previous years, Mr. Speaker, under the NDP government, they never ever fully funded. They always said, well we'll see if we have to or we'll see if we have to. And they were always doing one-offs and wondering if they had to pay or contribute into it, but it was never part of their budget to say they'd be fully funding it.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP planned to balance the budget from a few years ago and they never did it. A Finance critic said they could look at some of the initiatives around agriculture and look at some of the things they've done for municipalities. Which things, Mr. Speaker? Which things have they done both for agriculture and for municipalities in the province of Saskatchewan? I really would like to see that list and what they've done.

I do now also want to talk, Mr. Speaker, if I can, about the sale of the grain cars. The corporation was established in 1979 to address the capacity crisis. The government purchased 1,000 cars, 900 of which are still in service. Those cars are nearing the

end of their service life, leaving us with two choices: either we plan to replace the fleet over the next 14 years at an estimated cost of \$100 million; or we sell the cars while we still have some commercial value. There were very good reasons for the government to get into the grain business back in the 1970s, but times have changed, and we're in a much different place, Mr. Speaker. It should be noted that maintaining the fleet does come at a cost. In 2014 we repainted 293 cars. We estimate painting the rest of the fleet would cost about \$4.1 million. We will be giving Saskatchewan shortline railways the first opportunity to buy the cars which will ensure they will continue to service Saskatchewan farmers.

Mr. Speaker, the cars are being sold through a competitive request-for-offers process and the RFO [request for offers] submission deadline is May 12, 2017, with the sale expected to be concluded this summer under the oversight of a fairness adviser. The successful offers will provide the best overall value.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is important for Saskatchewan farmers but also for the Saskatchewan shortlines. It gives them capacity. It gives them opportunity to move grain to markets, but it also gives the grain producers a chance to load producer cars if they so wish. But it also gives opportunity for other grain industries to come in and do business with farmers, and it really creates a competitive atmosphere for the farmers to move their grain to different companies or through different mechanisms.

And we're seeing that on the shortlines right now, Mr. Speaker. We're seeing lentils being moved on shortline with brokers on shortlines. We're seeing durum being moved. We're seeing canola being moved. We're seeing peas being moved. So we're seeing all types of commodities being moved on shortlines through different brokers with farmers taking every opportunity to market their product around the world.

So I think it's important that we go down this road, but the most important thing to me, Mr. Speaker, on this one is the cars will be used by Saskatchewan farmers to move Saskatchewan grain. Under the previous leases they were leased to CP [Canadian Pacific] Rail. They were being used anywhere they could be in North America, wherever CP was using them and that's the reality of what it was. But now they will be actually hauling grain or agricultural commodities for Saskatchewan farmers.

I now, of course, want to touch on the Highways budget, Mr. Speaker, if I could. And I really do want to take this opportunity for thanking the Premier for giving me the honour to serve as the Minister of Highways. This is incredibly humbling of me to be in this position and something that I have thoroughly engaged myself in and enjoying at this point. This is of course as you know my very first budget this way, as Minister of Highways, and we invest in highways; we invest in safety and trade.

I do also want to talk, Mr. Speaker, if I could . . . I've had the opportunity at the last couple of SARM conventions to talk to municipal leaders around the province on ways that we can do, finding new ways that we can fund our highway system and how we can fix our roads in rural Saskatchewan. And it is amazing, Mr. Speaker, of the opportunities that we have come to with meeting with our municipal leaders around the province

where we are looking at highways that they will partner with us and we can do things to fix up their roads. Because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, there is only one taxpayer. And how do we find the ways to fix our highway network that is in dire needs of repair? And when we have the highways we do, we have to find new ways to do things and new challenges to do it.

So I do want to quote if I could, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the budget, last week . . . The president of the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association is Shantel Lipp and she summed it up well on budget day when she said this, Mr. Speaker:

Highways transportation is literally the artery that keeps this province going. Nothing moves in or out of this province unless it's on roads, so it's very important to have a highway infrastructure to have the ability to move our products to market.

[20:45]

So I think it's important. And this year's highway's budget, Mr. Speaker, is \$1.1 billion, the second-largest highways budget in Saskatchewan's history. To provide some context, during our 10 budgets in our office while we were in government, our government has invested over \$7.4 billion in highways and infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. In the last 10 years under the NDP, they spent 3.1 billion.

We have increased investment over 139 per cent in highway infrastructure in the province of Saskatchewan. This budget includes 500 million to the continued work on the Regina bypass, and 343 million for capital construction. We will see work on more than 900 kilometres of provincial highways improved, in addition to working on the bypass, Mr. Speaker.

We are investing in major projects such as passing lanes on Highway No. 5 from Humboldt towards No. 2 Highway, overpasses at Martensville and Warman, Highway 7 twinning from Vanscoy to Delisle, Highway 16 twinning east of Saskatoon, Highway 39 twinning from Estevan to Bienfait, and planning for passing lanes on Highway No. 4 north of North Battleford and Highway 7 west of Kindersley, Mr. Speaker.

And northern Saskatchewan remains an area of importance to our government. To highlight the importance, we are committing more than 53 million to build, operate, and maintain highways and airports in northern Saskatchewan. This work includes improvements to Highway 102 north of the junction with Highway 915, and the replacement of several bridges on Highway 165. This year, we will repave about 300 kilometres of provincial highway system. This includes some of our busiest highways, like Highway 9 north of Carlyle, Highway 11 near Lumsden, Highway 55 near Big River, Highway 12 near Blaine Lake, and Highway 21 near Glidden.

Five hundred and forty kilometres of medium treatments include Highway 1 near Moose Jaw, Highway 1 near Grenfell, Highway 1 near Maple Creek, Highway 2 near Weyakwin, Highway 3 near Kinistino, Highway 6 south of Regina, Highway 11 near Osler, Highway 13 near Trossachs, and Highway 219 south of Saskatoon.

And we are going to be doing some rural upgrades, Mr.

Speaker, and these are new types of technology and new types of surfacing that we're trying: Highway 4 south of Cadillac, Highway 51 near Kelfield, Highway 80 north of Esterhazy, and Highway 322 north of Silton.

Mr. Speaker, it seems . . . Now I do want to change my attention and I want to talk about the Regina bypass. Mr. Speaker, the NDP have always tried to smear this project. In 2015 the Government of Manitoba announced they were building four overpasses. This is in Manitoba in 2015. Four overpasses they were going to build in Manitoba, price expected to be \$800 million.

The Regina bypass project includes 12 overpasses, which the members opposite always seem to forget, in addition to 40 kilometres of new four-lane highways, 55 kilometres of new service roads, and rebuilding of 20 kilometres of four-lane on Highway No. 1, along with the 12 overpasses — all of this for 1.2 billion construction cost. We are getting a good deal, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP always use cost per kilometre on this project. That's like taking the cost to build a new \$200 million bridge and then dividing the cost by the kilometres paved and saying it was \$100 million per kilometre of paving. This comparison is misleading. The interim leader knows better. He had a technical briefing on the project. He knows it.

In her speech on budget day, the member from Nutana said, “. . . just imagine if the Sask Party had decided not to blow over \$2 billion in waste . . .” And she was talking about the Regina bypass project. In response to this, I want to read in the record what are people are saying about the project.

We've said on many occasions, we will continue saying, the bypass must be built and that the bypass must be built as soon as possible. That was the member from Athabasca. He went on to say:

And it should be stated right at the front that one of the things that's really important to this side of the Assembly is that it is important that people out there understand, when it comes to the Regina bypass, the NDP are in full support of having the bypass built . . .

Another comment — he must have made that up — Dewdney Avenue, which cuts through a residential neighbourhood, is inundated with heavy-haul truck traffic:

And it's just a major safety issue that, really it's my greatest concern that there's going to be tragic circumstances if left unresolved . . . The bypass is an important long-term solution . . . and timelines and resources are important on that front.

That was the interim leader who said that, Mr. Speaker. He knows how important the west section of the bypass is. His constituents know it, and they live it every day. He also stood in this place and petitioned the government to do something to address truck traffic on Dewdney Avenue. For over 80 times he stood and raised a petition on this issue.

The interim leader also commented on the east side of the

bypass project. And he said, I quote:

... lives are being placed at risk on a daily basis in and around Regina is out at Emerald Park and White City as they connect on Highway No. 1. And of course the bypass is ... an important piece there and proper connections to Highway 1 ... I hear from so many families that are coming in for work or that are coming in for sports or that are going out at night for different activities, it's a real threat out there right now.

Of course bypasses are the long-term plan ... We're going to be looking for commitment to resources and the timely fulfillment of these bypasses.

And I recognize the pressure you'd be facing from a host of different perspectives and certainly identify that the bypass is the long-term solution that needs timely fulfillment.

I would like to read in the record a letter that the member of Athabasca read into record in committee in 2014. And at the time, he was urging the government to move on the project. The letter was from Carmen Sasyniuk. Mr. Speaker, I could go into the letter. I really would like to go into it but I think I'm getting close to the end of my time, but I'm getting kind of wound up. Should I read the letter? Mr. Speaker, I'll read the letter:

Every person who lives in Emerald Park, White City, Balgonie, Pilot Butte, Edenwold all have a child, a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a friend of whom they worry about when travelling this stretch of highway. As well as local traffic, out-of-area drivers who use the highway are also ... [experiencing] concern, including my own family members from Yorkton who ... [drive] to avoid Highway ... 1 ... whenever possible.

As a resident of Emerald Park and mother of children ages 14 and 12, my children learning to drive is troublesome to say the least. Some friends and neighbours already have children driving, and they all seem to say the same thing. The moment their child leaves home to make that left-hand turn on Highway No. 1 into Regina is gut wrenching. My neighbour made the comment that after her son would leave their home to go into Regina and she [would] followed shortly after, she was sick all the way to Great Plains Road until she arrived at the same left-hand turn on to the highway, praying he had safely crossed. One mother of a 15-year-old has even told me that her and her husband have thought about not letting their son not take his driver's licence test until things improve on Highway No. 1.

Mr. Speaker, this was read by the then member from Athabasca in the House here, and now they stand up and run down the project, Mr. Speaker. No leadership. No credibility. The member from Athabasca admitted it on budget day. He said, "... this could be the largest overrun in the history of the province of Saskatchewan when it comes to infrastructure work, Mr. Speaker. [Oh] I made that last part up" This is typical NDP — talk, and a lot, but never delivered.

Mr. Speaker, this is what really brings me to the NDP economy.

It really does. We built a framework that business can thrive in. That's what we strive to do. The New Democrats competed with families and their business. And, Mr. Speaker, I do want to give a story, a family story, and it just burns. It bothers me to this day, Mr. Speaker.

This one I'm not making up. In 1979, Mr. Speaker, my brother and I were looking at buying a farm and expanding our farming operation. We had a deal made with a neighbouring landowner. We were going that day to write him the cheque, and we went into his house and sat down. We were having a cup of coffee and he said, boys, I hate to inform you, but land bank called today and they made a better offer than you did.

Mr. Speaker, we had to compete with the then NDP government, who owned land bank, to buy land with our own tax dollars. They were using my tax dollars to outbid me to buy a farm. To this day I've never forgiven the NDP party for that, for getting into the land bank or owning farm land they shouldn't be. We as governments should not be in the business of owning land. That should be left to the private landowners. The farmers and ranchers know how to look after the property and ...

An Hon. Member: — Yes, but Karl Marx said we should.

Hon. Mr. Marit: — Well, sorry. I'm not a Karl Marx fan either, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the member from Prince Albert Northcote talked about how government should be doing business. And she went back to the old NDP playbook of government competing with business and she said, "And I hope that we can expand our Crowns." And she said, "That's how you diversify our economy." She forgets how it was in the old days, Mr. Speaker. She talked about SaskTel doing business in France, and SaskEnergy doing business in Nova Scotia, and she was upset that SaskTel had to sell Navigata. I don't want to get into it, Mr. Speaker. I'll be here all night. The NDP lost \$90 million on that deal.

They lost millions on all kinds of schemes competing with other businesses, Mr. Speaker. They lost millions in Guyana trying to start a power company. They lost 17 million on Coachman Insurance, an attempted Ontario insurance company. Mr. Speaker, this wasn't even money lost in our own province; this was lost in other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker. It goes on. I have pages of it, the same as Minister of Ag. We had pages of it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude with this, I really do, that we focus on core services. I believe that we are a very fiscal responsible government. I think this is a very fiscal responsible budget. Mr. Speaker, we will have a balanced budget within three years. Mr. Speaker, I want to end with this: that I am in favour of the minister's finance budget. I will be supporting his motion. I will not be supporting the amendment by the member opposite. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Steele: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into my speech here tonight, I'd like to thank a few people from home: my wife and my family and the members, the voters in our

constituency. My wife has been there for many years helping me, backing me up on the farm over the years that I've been active in municipal politics and politics in general. Now I'm here today. My son and daughter, one is in Lethbridge and one lives outside of Grand Coulee here of Regina. My son and daughter-in-law just transferred from Pelican Narrows to just outside of Regina here to White City. I thank them for their support.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in support of the budget. It's a budget we can be proud of and makes me glad to be a member of this government, and this caucus has shown clearly that we are meeting the challenges with the 2017-2018 budget.

The job of every Member of the Legislative Assembly is to help keep Saskatchewan moving forward, shaping a better province for today, tomorrow, and the future. This is a job we all take seriously, and there's no question we are facing difficult times due to sustained lower resource prices. Mr. Speaker, this has required us to make some difficult decisions.

These difficult decisions are what was needed to meet the changes we face, and I believe the end result will be what is needed to bring the budget to a balance over the course of the next three years, unlike our neighbours to the west who are facing similar financial challenges due to resource prices. Alberta has not put any restraints on their spending; that will leave Albertans and their children a debt that will cost them dearly in the future. Our budget shows that we have pulled in our reins on our spending while trying to keep as much financial strain off the people of Saskatchewan.

The most important part of any budget is to keep revenues and expenditures manageable. With the resource revenues declining over the last couple of years, our government was faced with economic and budgetary challenges in the 2017-2018 budget. Mr. Speaker, the revenues from natural resources are down by about \$1 billion. The budget commits to moving away from relying on resource revenues and continue building a solid foundation during these challenging times. Our government will continue to do that and keep the best interest of the people in Saskatchewan.

[21:00]

Mr. Speaker, our government is dedicated to meeting the challenges before us: controlling and reducing spending, modernizing the tax base, and ensuring our economy remains strong. As government, we had to look at every area of service delivery and to ensure the resources are being used in the most effective and efficient manner. Anyone who has managed a household budget knows that when money stops coming in, you need to stop spending and re-evaluate your budget. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, as a government we took the time to listen to the people of the province and we have acted, honouring our commitments we made to those who voted for us. Under the financial strains, our government made the tough decisions — decisions that were not easy and ones that nobody takes lightly. We hope the people are able to understand the reasons and the purpose behind these decisions. Perhaps they will appreciate in the long term the good it will be. The good will be for the whole

province as we alternate to a new tax base. Continued investments in our province's future, through strategic infrastructure and keeping the deficit and debt in control.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of agriculture in our economy by continuing to invest in programs, services to continue to drive sustainable growth in support of our farmers and ranchers within the province. In the Southwest, agriculture plays a large part of everyday life. The work on the farm or the ranch differs throughout the year with each season, bringing rewards. Spring is a busy time of the year. The smell of the newly worked up soil when planting a crop, or the sight of the newborn calves a sign of promise. In the fall, you reap the rewards of your long hours of toil. Through the changes in the weather or the highs and lows of the price adversities, producers always emerge stronger than before. They bind together and support each other and display Canadian pride that has sustained farmers and ranchers for so many centuries.

On our modern farms, youth are more knowledgeable and achieving things their forefathers never thought possible. Agriculture is a foundation of our province, and our government wants to make sure we are providing the right services in the right locations using the best delivery options possible. We are asking producers and industry how we can better service them and how we can ensure activities remain relevant and valuable.

With the industry forever evolving, our extension activities need to be driving sustainable growth and ensuring our producers stay competitive in the global market. Agriculture research will continue to be supported, with investment of 26.8 million being funded by the province, supporting farmers and ranchers to continue to develop and produce self-sufficient, high-valued operations. Our government wants to ensure that our next generation is in a good position to build their future right here at home.

Over the last decade, Saskatchewan's agriculture exports grew by 186 per cent. Last year's ag exports were the second largest on record, with total sales of 14 billion to 147 countries in all. Thirteen countries were recipients of over 200 million in Saskatchewan's ag food exports, making Saskatchewan's agriculture the most diversified market of any sector in Canada's economy. We can be proud of the work our producers do every day. Not only does their hard work benefit our province but benefits our nation and we are making a better world.

Mr. Speaker, we all know how near and dear health care is to our hearts. Saskatchewan has long been known in Canada as a pioneer in the health care field. We announced earlier this year that the current 12 health regions would be consolidated into a single provincial health authority. The new provincial governance health board will be responsible for health services delivered for the entire province, reporting to the Minister of Health. The new health board will change the structure of the health care system roles and responsibilities, making the health care system more effective and efficient.

This transition will ensure better coordination in health services across the province while reducing the duplication of administration costs. We continue to remain as committed to

providing a high-quality health care to the people of Saskatchewan as we did on the first day we formed government. Mr. Speaker, the priority is to strengthen and improve the way health care is administered in an effective manner, meeting the health needs at a local level. I would like to point out that this government has been a leader in the field of health care since we took office in 2007. In addition, Saskatchewan has the shortest surgical wait times.

This leadership has been shown not only to benefit urban care centres, but also those in rural and remote areas of the province. Mr. Speaker, we have made significant improvements towards creating facilities, providing innovative services, and recruiting health care professionals throughout the rural and remote areas of this province. Our government has continued to help increase the physicians that practice in our province over the last 10 years. An increase of more than 750 doctors and over 3,000 more nurses have come to work in Saskatchewan. Our government will continue to recruit and retain doctors and nurses to ensure that a high level of care continues to be given to the people in this province.

The exact opposite happened when the NDP was in government. Saskatchewan had the worst doctor and nurse retention rate in Canada. From 2001 to 2006, 173 doctors and 450 nurses left the province. In addition, they also closed 52 hospitals during their time in term. It is obvious our plan has and will continue to move Saskatchewan forward while the NDP's record and retention will only remove our province back. Let's never go back.

Mr. Speaker, the 2017-2018 budget continued to prove that this government is committed to investing in health care across the province, investing 5.2 billion in infrastructure and core health care services. We have made significant improvements towards creating health care facilities, providing innovative services, and recruiting health care professionals across the province.

Mr. Speaker, the 2017-2018 budget commits to building a solid foundation during these challenging times. We will continue to look after keeping the best interest of the people in Saskatchewan in mind in everything we do while other jurisdictions simply download the current fiscal challenges to the future generations.

Mr. Speaker, modernizing the tax base will secure a more stable economy, ensuring Saskatchewan's taxes remain fair and competitive. Our government has taken into consideration the growth rate of our province by reducing income taxes, which we will realize will be key for the strong economy. This will attract new economic activities which in turn will create new jobs and investments throughout the province. Mr. Speaker, our government is ensuring that taxes remain fair and competitive at every income level. The switch to a greater reliance on compensation taxes will ensure that our tax system is fair for decades to come.

Over the next couple of years the reduction in personal income tax reductions will continue growing and will make Saskatchewan one of the most competitive jurisdictions to both earning a living and invested. Since 2007 there's been nearly 6 billion in tax reductions for families, individuals, businesses, and farmers. We have among the lowest in personal and

business tax burdens in Canada. This contrasts with an NDP . . . While in government, they raised the taxes 21 times during their 16 years in power, including raising the PST four times and the gas tax twice.

Mr. Speaker, even with the increases, the PST to 6 per cent, Saskatchewan still has the lowest provincial sales tax rate in Canada among provinces that have PST. Saskatchewan people will also pay among the lowest income tax in Canada. Because of reduction, this . . . reductions in this budget and the planned reductions we come to balance everyone at every level in income. We will be paying less income tax. Mr. Speaker, that means people will see more money on their paycheques.

Saskatchewan is leading in Canada in job growth, and with our province's low taxes and tax incentives, we will continue to attract new investments and jobs to our province.

Our government has refused to plan to implement a federal government-imposed carbon tax. Saskatchewan's economy would be hit hard if this tax like this was imposed on the people of the province. Saskatchewan would be the only province in Canada with no carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind everyone that the NDP was in favour of the carbon tax that would have put more hardship on the people in this province . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . That's not happening? Okay.

Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the resources are being used in the most effective and efficient manner. This includes investing in our kids. As government, we have demonstrated that we are not about closing down schools. In fact, since being in government, we have built 40 brand new schools. This is in clear contrast to when the NDP were in power. Between 2000 and 2007 the NDP shut down 176 schools when in government. This left 400 teachers without jobs, many of which had to leave the province to find work.

A clear sign that things are going well in the province, in population's growth, Saskatchewan's population has grown by 130,000 people since 2006. Our government will continue to invest in education and schools to ensure that we are prepared for future growth. We continue to promote growth by making record investments of every kind. Mr. Speaker, we continue to make significant investments in the quality of education provided in the province, ensuring that the resources that have been provided are effectively achieving the right outcomes for our students. Our government believes in investing in the future. Even with some of our constraints we have in this budget, there will be 21 new schools opening this year.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud that we have chosen to continue improving our infrastructure. In doing this we are helping improve the quality of care in our communities across the province and benefiting the people that we serve. Investing in infrastructure that we drive on will help to make it safe for travel and supporting the growth of our economy.

New infrastructure of schools, ensuring the facilities housing education, pre-K [pre-kindergarten] to grade 12 continues, continues as a whole house to grow . . . will create tremendous benefits down the road. Building and adding on to infrastructure of our hospitals to help address over-capacity pressures and

emergency department wait times. Mr. Speaker, it is clear our government is continuing to take care of the people in Saskatchewan with maintaining the needs, health care, infrastructure of our communities that we all depend on.

Mr. Speaker, every year we continue to support growth of child care spaces across the province. Over the last 10 years we have added 6,500 spaces. We continue to invest in our youth, our future, which we feel is a very worthy investment.

[21:15]

Our government has made choices that will define our future. Instead of putting a freeze on capital spending and shocking the economy, we will continue to move forward and keep up the maintenance of our aging infrastructure, lowering income tax for the people of our province, and keeping the carbon tax at bay. Our government will also continue to ensure that important government programs and services remain affordable and sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this budget. I am proud of our decisions that we made. This budget represents our government's care for the people of Saskatchewan. We are going to continue moving forward and return to a budget to be balanced, and I support the 2017-2018 budget.

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

Mr. Steinley: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as all of our colleagues have done, before I get into my budget comments I want to thank a few people in my life that allow me to do the job we do. First and foremost is my wife, Larissa. We have taken the Saskatchewan government's growth plan very seriously so we've added our third child here on January 2nd. So we have three children: Nickson, who is three and a half; Claire, who is 19 months; and Jameson, who's two months. And they'd better be in bed so they better not be watching dad tonight on TV. So goodnight. I love you.

My wife, Larissa, who is at home right now on maternity leave, and she is one of the most amazing people I know. She is a perfect mother to our three children and supports us, the job I do here very well. She deals with me on a day-to-day basis which should give her sainthood almost automatically, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I just want to say thank you very much for all you do, Larissa. You make our family work and you allow me to do a job in this House, so thank you very much. I love you . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Thank you, colleagues.

Moving on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a lot of people within our constituency that make the good work of the people of Walsh Acres, answer the calls, and that's Heather Howell-Shiplack is our constituency assistant in Walsh Acres. And she's been with us since the beginning. She does such a good job and she works hard and she handles the calls professionally. And she makes sure that we get answers for our constituents when they're calling into the office and she's, like all of our colleagues have said, kind of the first line when people come in and they call our office. I'm very fortunate to have her. She does a wonderful job, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have a great constituency association. We went through a campaign not too long ago and I have a lot of people that helped out in the campaign and volunteers, a lot to name, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I want to say thank you to my constituency association and our campaign team in Walsh Acres. They did a great job and they allow me to have the honour to rise in this Assembly and talk to budgets and talk to throne speeches, and outside of this Assembly to bring forward the concerns of the people of Walsh Acres in our caucus. And it's a responsibility I don't take lightly, and it's something I think all must do the best job that we can to represent our constituents. And I think we have that part of our job, which is the most important part, is to lobby for the people that we represent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there continues to be a divergence between the renewal we see in the economy and what we're experiencing in government. The economy is getting stronger. We know that, not just anecdotally but statistically. But revenues in government are still weak and by now you're probably familiar with some of those numbers. This fiscal year non-renewable resources are down about \$1.2 billion from 2014 levels. That's \$1.2 billion on a \$14.4 billion budget, a drop of about 8 per cent. Well that's what we're facing today, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Oil has fallen back below \$500 a barrel West Texas Intermediate, and most experts say the ceiling for that increase is \$60 a barrel. That's when American shale producers will get busy and bring on more supply. We're not going to see \$100 oil very soon. And making matters worse, uranium and potash prices are near record lows and the recovery in those markets will be prolonged.

Resource revenues are lower and so is tax revenues for government. This fiscal year tax revenue has dropped \$400 million from what we forecast in our budget. Resource revenues . . . On expenditure side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are pressures in health care, social services, and corrections, in part because of our growing population. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're getting hit at both ends, revenues and expenditures. Over time these pressures will erode our ability to provide the services that support quality of life in our province. It will put in peril the Saskatchewan advantage we've all worked so hard to create together.

We have to take action on a deficit today, not tomorrow, not at some undetermined point in the future. Because we've seen other governments in Canada kick the can down the road, postpone the hard decisions that must be made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps in the belief that somehow deficit will magically take care of themselves. But budgets don't balance themselves. It will take a determined, disciplined effort on the part of everyone in government at all levels of government to deal with these very real challenges.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about the budget from both sides of the House but we often forget to talk about what the 2017-18 budget means for the big picture for our province. And by big picture, I mean what this budget means for future generations.

Before I get into that, I want to acknowledge the tough decisions that were made, and that every person who has seen a pay cut or a position removed, those are decisions we don't take lightly but we need to take those decisions in order to ensure our province stays strong for future generations. Further, the

unprecedented and sustained low energy prices we have seen have made an impact. We've seen a shortfall, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my emphasis however is about future generations. Admittedly I've spent a lot of time thinking about the future lately and thinking about my kids' future, having just added another little one in January. Although my three kids are at home right now, and I'm sure the economy is the furthest thing on their minds, we need to think about them and all of our children with every policy we make.

Mr. Speaker, that is the problem with the NDP. They seem not to care about the future. Everything they say is about now and everything they demand has no way to be paid for. On this side of the House, we know we need to plan to get back to balanced budgets. The reason: that every dollar we go in debt today is a dollar that my kids will have to pay back tomorrow. It's a dollar that future generations won't have to pay for the services they and we will all depend on. I for one am willing to make tough decisions today to make sure that my kids have the future they deserve tomorrow.

The 2017-18 budget continues to improve the Saskatchewan advantage for businesses, job creation, and restrained spending — things that we need for future generations to succeed. Although members opposite can't understand that their reckless spending hinders future generations, I'd like to emphasize some of the encouraging economic indicators that demonstrate that our policies are moving the province forward and in the right direction.

This past weekend, we've seen two major private sector investments in the province. We see that Brandt Industries is purchasing Hitachi facility in Saskatoon — which some Saskatoon members, you would think, would be happy about — a facility that will produce some of the technology needed to move our economy forward.

We see Grain Millers announced a \$100 million project investment in Yorkton, dollars that will pay dividends in the community for generations to come by making sure there are good-paying jobs and high-quality agricultural services for local farmers to ship their grains globally.

There are other key indicators that speak to where the economy is going in the right direction. We've seen record growth in manufacturing sales. They rose by 5.4 per cent between November 2016 and December 2016. Nationally, sales were up 2.3 per cent on a year-over-year basis. Sales were up 1.9 per cent, seasonally adjusted, in Saskatchewan — the second highest among all provinces and well ahead of the 4.1 per cent posted nationally. In December, manufacturing sales totalled 1.3 billion. Major gains on an annual basis were recorded year over year for machinery manufacturing; wood products also, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is good news and shows although revenues are feeling the impact of low energy prices, the economy is moving in the right direction.

Another key indicator is job growth. We saw that in February 2017, 8,000 jobs were created in Saskatchewan, up 1.4 per cent, the highest growth rate in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker. More people were employed in Saskatchewan in February than ever before, with 563,600 people working in our province.

Major year-over-year gains were reported: for trade, up 700,000; professionals — scientific and technical services, up 4,800; educational services, up 4,500; and manufacturing, up 3,000, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, off-reserve Aboriginal employment was up 4,400 for eight consecutive months of year-over-year increases. Although there are a lot of numbers there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the thing that I will remember is that people are working.

I'd like to now discuss some of the key aspects of our budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and first and foremost, I think we should talk about the wind-down of STC. This is one of the toughest choices we've made in our budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And like I said earlier, we don't take these decisions lightly. We realize that there are going to be 224 staff out of work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we know that that's going to affect them and their families.

And these are decisions that were tough, and I think both sides of the House understand these tough decisions are made. I think the member from Saskatoon Centre, who was in government for a few years, he made a quote that I agree with, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the NDP cut 500 jobs, a large number of those were environment. The then-minister from Environment, the member from Saskatoon Centre, said: "Now, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately as a result of this need to reduce expenditures, we also had to reduce staff and this was not an easy decision to make."

I agree with the member from Saskatoon Centre. He goes on: "But in order to govern effectively, we had to have responsible finances and not to back down from these difficult choices [we made]." Mr. Deputy Speaker, I give him credit. They made some very tough choices when they were in government, and the member from Saskatoon Centre understands those tough choices that they had.

I think now we're going through some of these same tough choices. And we understand that they had to make tough choices and we're going to have to make these decisions to ensure that we have strength going forward and strength for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, we did some tax changes in this budget, and I want to talk about a few of those tax changes. Tax changes make up the most visible part of this budget. The provincial sales tax rate is being raised by one point, from 5 to 6 per cent, and a number of PST exemptions are being eliminated to meet the current financial challenge.

Although everyone notices this, the reality is that this is part of a major restructuring of Saskatchewan's tax system. We will see a personal corporate income tax, personal income tax reduction by half a per cent point on each bracket effective July 1st, 2015 and by another half a point effective July 1st, 2019. Likewise the corporate income tax rate will be reduced by half a point in 2017 and by a further half point in 2019. When fully implemented, Saskatchewan will have the lowest corporate tax rate and the lowest tax rate on manufacturing and processing in the country, giving Saskatchewan a tremendous advantage to attract new business investment and jobs to our province. This will make taxes more fair for all people in Saskatchewan and

stabilize the tax base for future generations.

Getting back to balance is where we're headed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A deficit of 685 million is forecasted for this year, a smaller shortfall of 304 million is projected for 2018-19, followed by a 50 million surplus in 2019-20, and a sum of 183 million surplus in '20-21. And I think another thing to note is in this budget there's a \$300 million contingency fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's to deal with pressures in budgets that come up either in health care or social services or corrections. And I think that's some prudent budgeting done this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which I think is a very good change that we've made to ensure that we account for some of the pressures that growing provinces face. When your population grows, there's going to be some more pressures on health care and social services, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture's budget for 2017-18 is 388.6 million, continues to support Saskatchewan's strong agriculture industry. As we all recognize, agriculture is one of the backbones of our province.

The 2017-18 budget continues to invest in post-secondary education. That's something I want to talk about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I am going to do something I didn't think I'd ever do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm going to quote Joe Biden. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Biden said when he was VP [vice-president], "Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget, and I will tell you what you value."

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that holds true for our budget. Seventy-five cents of every dollar goes into health care, education, and social services — 75 cents of every dollar. That's what we value on this side. You can see that by our investments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you put that much money into three segments of your operations, people know that although there are some restraint measures in this budget, we value those three things above all else. So when you look at our budget, you can see what we value, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[21:30]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Central Services . . . And this affects one of our . . . the Crown jewel of our legislation and legislature, Wascana Centre Authority. Government Services will take on responsibility for Wascana Centre as part of the '17-18 provincial budget. The change will see a streamlined approach to operations and investments in the park and will bring stability to Wascana Centre's funding.

An independent review in 2011 . . . And I hope the members opposite listen to this from Regina. An independent review in 2011 commissioned by the centre's partners, the city of Regina, the University of Regina, and the province, highlighted issues with an unsustainable funding model and an infrastructure deficit, which they should know a lot about, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's what they kind of do. The report recommended the province assume control of the park. The Wascana Centre partners will continue to have input for decisions, and the committee structure is part of the Provincial Capital Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that's something we've heard loud

and clear, is everyone values Wascana Centre Authority, and having it roll into the Provincial Capital Commission gives it more ability to have a more stable funding structure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And also there is an infrastructure deficit in Wascana Centre, and the Provincial Capital Commission is able to deal with that infrastructure deficit more capably.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in education, the Government of Saskatchewan today released the final report from the advisory panel on education governance renewal. The government is accepting the findings in the report including keeping elected boards — something we heard a lot about and we heard the people talk and they wanted to keep their elected school boards; that's in the budget — no major school division boundary changes, keeping the focus on the education sector strategy plan, making legislative changes to clarify roles within the sector and create efficiencies, and improving engagement with First Nations and Métis, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Saskatchewan's 28 school divisions will receive \$1.86 billion in school operating funding which includes revenues collected from the education property tax. This is down 22 million from 2016-17 and represents a 1.2 per cent reduction year over year. Overall the 2017-18 budget provides 2.02 billion for education, a 6.7 per cent decrease in funding compared to last year. Much of the decrease — now, important — much of the decrease is due to 262 million reduction in funds. And why were those funds . . . Why is there a reduction of those funds? The construction of the 18 new schools in Regina, Saskatoon, Warman, and Martensville which are scheduled for completion and to open in 2017, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And some of the members opposite and even some of the new ones have caught on to this fearmongering jargon that the NDP continue to use since the beginning of time. They did it when, last budget when they said, oh you're not going to fund all the teachers' contracts so teachers aren't going to get paid. False. Never happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now they're trying to say, oh you've built these 18 schools but you're not going to have desks or teachers in them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, only an NDP MLA or one of their followers would believe that someone would build a school and then not staff it. Like I don't know . . . And first of all, I don't even understand how they can talk about building schools because they never built any. So how would they even know what the staffing requirements would be, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

So when . . . I take their advice with a little grain of salt when they talk about building infrastructure and you're not going to staff education and you're not going to staff schools, when they never built a thing in 16 years. If I want advice from them, I'll go and ask them how to close schools because they closed 176 schools.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think sometimes they need to throttle back the hyperbole. And I don't know if they've realized it but I think the fearmongering thing isn't working really well. I think that's not really going over with the public over the last couple elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I think the one thing that we have done here, and we've said it time and time again, is that this budget is a plan. It's a plan to get that back to balance. It's a plan to make sure that this

province doesn't go into debt further, like our neighbours to the west.

And I'm very excited. At some point in time, I don't know when it's going to be, probably after their leadership race, but I'm very excited to see when they come up with a plan, when they actually come up with ideas on what they're going to do. Because I know their last plan, and I have it in here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is . . . Their last plan, when they . . . They had a plan. It has to be their campaign platform because that's the last time they had an idea. So when you look at their campaign platform they have 17, 17 promises that they never even costed for a billion dollars. So that's the last time they've had a plan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we still have to go with the plan they had ran on the campaign until they come up with something new.

Hopefully the member from Lakeview gets her leadership website up so she can show us her plan, what direction she's going to take the province in, because she's enjoying heckling from her seat, but I've never heard her come up with an idea. But I'm very, very excited to see what her leadership campaign, when she rolls it out, what's that going to look like, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think she's gearing up. I think she's gearing up, and it's going to be interesting. The member from Meewasin has a little bit of a head start and some more name recognition, but I think she could probably catch him, I think, if she gets out early enough here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now going back to the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm running a little bit short on time but I have a few people that talked about our budget. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Jack Mintz, he probably knows more about economics than, I'm guessing, than their caucus. But I'd say that a quote from Jack Mintz is, "Saskatchewan's budget is a dream for fiscally prudent voters: it keeps spending down, starts balancing the books, and shifts taxation to less distortionary revenue sources," which I think is a good thing.

That's another thing that they called for over there. At some point in time they called for, we wanted to diversify the economy. We wanted to rely less on oil. So we made some tax changes to be less reliant on oil, less reliant on potash, have a more reliable revenue stream. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you'd think they'd appreciate that. Even the Leap Manifesto member over there from Nutana, you'd think . . . If the government's moving away from resource revenue, which she can't stand, you'd think, hey, I would think she should appreciate that because she doesn't want any extraction anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And unfortunately my time is running short, but there's a few things . . . One thing that the member from Riversdale says — and you might find this shocking, but the member from Riversdale and I are probably never going to agree on anything, even the colour of the sky — but she said, she said, how you look after your most vulnerable and your youngest, and she used a nice quote, and how you look after your youngest, your most vulnerable, that's how you should be judged as a government. So just a quick little thing on how they looked after the youngest — closed 176 schools. Wow, you must really care about the young people in our province.

From 2000 to 2007, the numbers of teachers dropped 400. So

they actually fired the people that are supposed to look after our youngest, our next generation, which they chased out of the province anyway so they didn't care. They underfunded K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education leading to significant education property tax increases and tax revolts.

In 16 years, and this is their child care rant, in 16 years those members opposite created 2,856 child care spaces. You should be embarrassed of that record. And you . . . they chirp us on this side for creating over 10,000 and they did 2,856. You should be ashamed of yourselves for not giving people a chance to have good child care, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The NDP cut nearly 500 million out of the municipal revenue sharing. And so you look after your most vulnerable. How did they look after the seniors in our province? Saskatchewan lost 450 nurses, 173 doctors from 2001 to 2006, longest wait times in Canada, closed 52 hospitals, closed 1,200 long-term care beds. And this kills me, because they stand hand over chest and talk about how much they care for seniors, and they didn't raise the seniors' income plan once. That's embarrassing for your record and embarrassing for your government.

I'll be supporting this government's budget. I will not be supporting the amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'll be supporting this government because they have a plan for the future. And I'll be proud to stand up and talk about this government's budget with my kid, going down the road, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my honour to rise and speak to this budget. Unfortunately there's absolutely zero honour in this budget or in the members opposite. But I'll get into that a little bit more after I first take the opportunity to thank the people who have elected me, people who I'm representing in Regina Douglas Park, giving me the opportunity to be here and the honour to be here, as well as the members of my family who have been so supportive.

My parents, I have to take the opportunity to thank my parents who've been nothing but supportive to me. And my partner as well who puts up with my crazy schedule and often our times of moving in and out of . . . Or going to public events and having to have a lot of conversations about important issues. But sometimes it's a bit of a lot for my partner to handle, so I want to thank him as well too.

But I don't want to take . . . Oh, I also should take one moment also to thank my constituency assistant, Nathaniel, who works really hard every single day. He's actually at a town hall meeting where there's quite a few community members tonight at the Artesian who are quite upset over this budget. And it seems like we're in crazy land when we're in the House, or we're in some sort of vacuum where nothing's wrong and there's nothing to see here. But we don't actually operate in a vacuum. And there's actually a lot of people who are rising up to speak their piece, their anger about the terrible budget that we have in front of us, Mr. Speaker, and tonight is no exception. So I want to thank Nathaniel for being there this evening to hear what the people are saying.

Now I know this sounds crazy, and I want my colleagues to stop me if they heard any of this during the election, which was less than 12 months ago, or even giving them a pass if they heard any of this during the Meewasin by-election, which was less than a month ago. Now PST up 1 per cent; removal of many PST exemptions including children's clothes, Mr. Deputy Speaker — children's clothes which includes baby bibs, baby blankets, children's clothing and footwear, really, really frivolous things apparently, Mr. Deputy Speaker — those are the real extras in life apparently; diapers, cloth and disposable; jackets; pyjamas; underwear, that's where we're putting the burden of this government's failings on. In addition they're going to expand the PST to cover restaurants, snacks, and construction.

Now I've heard a lot, and some of the members opposite seem to say that they haven't heard anybody speaking up against this budget and haven't heard anything. Well I think a lot of members on this side could speak about quite a few conversations we've had, and it's only been a few days, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And people are still sort of reeling and are still kind of learning about how this budget is going to have serious impacts for a lot of people.

But I was in a restaurant on Friday night in Regina, downtown Regina, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and there's a lot of local business owners who are incredibly upset over the multiple ways they're being hit by this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this local restaurant owner was particularly upset and feeling particularly devastated by the impact, and that this . . . Restaurants operate on a low cost recovery model and they don't have a whole lot of profit margin to work with. So when we're talking about expanding PST exemptions and increasing the PST, it can have a real impact on things like local restaurants, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we're talking about Saskatchewan people. Lots of them are my generation, starting new businesses, growing our local economy, because it's businesses like these that grow our local economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are the ones that employ many people and they are what make our community great, frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they're the ones that are apparently going to have to carry the burden for this government's failings, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's absolutely ridiculous.

And I wanted to go into this a little bit because the member from Walsh Acres was talking a little bit about education funding and seemed to not completely have all of his facts straight.

Now this budget is also including a cut to education funding. It's actually a fairly major cut, not just to post-secondary but also to K to 12, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the weird thing is that the education property tax is also going up. So in Regina, the education property tax is going up 10.5 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but they're changing the rules so none of that money is going to go to education. It's all going into the GRF [General Revenue Fund], Mr. Deputy Speaker. So like I said, even though education property tax is going up, education is actually experiencing a reduction. And the member from Walsh Acres seemed to not totally have his facts straight in that regard, so I'm going to provide him a little bit of a lesson here.

Now this is a Government of Saskatchewan document that is talking about the school division fiscal year and the difference in funding for each school division in our province. Now I am seeing a whole lot of minus signs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's because every single school division in this province is receiving a reduction in funding. So for the member from Walsh Acres benefit, I'll go specifically to Regina's.

[21:45]

Regina Catholic is going to have a decrease in funding of 1 per cent. Regina Public is going to have a decrease in funding of 2.3 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's massive for our education sector. That's massive for school divisions who have worked hard to build efficiencies within their own systems to save and to make sure that they're not doing anything that will impact student learning, that will impact student success. But these cuts are so big that we're going to end up seeing larger classroom sizes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And the ridiculous thing, the thing that . . . Well it's not the thing that frustrates me the most about members opposite because there's too many things to count right now. But I don't know how many times we've heard about the new schools opening up since the budget because it's what they're using as one of their good news stories because there's so many bad news stories right now frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But when you see a reduction in funding to a school division, I'm not too sure how they're supposed to hire more teachers with less money than they already have, how they're supposed to pay for more furniture with less money than they have, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I'm not too sure what sort of math the member from Walsh Acres is doing in his mind, but it just doesn't make any sense to me.

Just looking at some of the other school divisions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're talking about an 8 per cent reduction in funding for Chinook School Division; for Christ the Teacher, 4.9 per cent; for Creighton, 4.7 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I could go all down the line here because there's a lot of members on the other side who represent these areas, and I'm not too sure what they're going to tell their constituents when their school divisions find out how much money they won't be getting this year, as opposed to last year.

And it's real rich for a government to increase funding to a property tax called the education property tax but not actually provide that corresponding increase into education. That money is going to flow into the GRF, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then we're not going to be able to trace it. And that's what's frustrating, one of quite a few things frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that are frustrating about this.

Another thing that I think members opposite seem to not fully understand are the massive changes that are going to happen with . . . into *The Education Act*, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I think the member from Walsh Acres had just said in his speech that they were talking about perhaps amalgamating school divisions. They listened to the people, and they've decided that they're going to keep their locally elected school boards because they listened to the people. People really wanted to keep their locally elected school boards so that they weren't

going to make any changes to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But I think, and I don't . . . I want to have the benefit of the doubt to those backbenchers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I think that they didn't read the fine print. I'm hoping that they're not hoping that their constituents won't read the fine print of this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I know quite a few of the members on this side of the House went into communities that were very, very upset over the thought of losing their school boards. I know my colleague from Regina Lakeview went to a lot of those community meetings. I went in particular to Wymark, Saskatchewan because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, their MLA and the MLAs around that area did not want to attend. There was about 90 people, I think, at that meeting.

I'm just going into my phone to remember what ridings I'm talking about. So Wymark school division, or Wymark, Saskatchewan is in the Wood River riding, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's just south of the Premier's riding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's close to ridings like Cypress Hills and Lumsden-Morse, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the 90 people that I saw, like I said, very, very upset over the thought of losing their locally elected school boards, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They were worried about losing control, and they were worried about losing a say.

So if you look in the fine print, and I've got . . . This is the budget in my hands. There is going to be a change to *The Education Act*, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'm going to read directly from the budget because I'm hoping that what's happened here is that members opposite haven't actually read this, and I'm hoping that it's not that they're trying to . . . Oh, I don't know what's a parliamentary word for what I'm thinking of saying, but I'm hoping that, let's just hope that that's what's happening here is that they're trying to . . . is that they haven't actually read the fine print.

"The purpose of this Bill is to provide the Minister of Education with . . ." Now members are heckling from the other side, but you really should listen to this if you haven't heard it yet or if you haven't bothered to read it yet because it's very important. You're going to have to explain this to your constituents:

The purpose of this Bill is to provide the Minister of Education with additional powers and authority to issue directives to the boards of education and the Conseil des écoles francophones with respect to the number of approved trustees and their compensation levels, and the expenditure of capital and operating funding provided by government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the expenditure of capital and operating funding provided by government are the trustees' powers. The trustees' powers are being taken away; the trustees' powers are going to the Minister. Everybody's school divisions are going to be run out of Regina. I hope that it's the backbench MLAs didn't read this and just didn't realize what was going on. And I hope that they didn't just assume that their constituents weren't going to read the fine print of this budget because I can assure you that this does nothing in terms of reflecting what constituents have been saying about their concerns with the

school division amalgamations. This is not in any way reflecting what we've been hearing across the province and, I'm sure, MLAs on the other side have been hearing across the province.

The MLA from Battleford was courageous enough to do his job, frankly, and advocate for his constituents, and was actually in the media saying that his constituents were very concerned about locally elected school boards losing their voice. So I'm hoping that the MLA for Battleford hasn't read the fine print of this and I hope that when he does, he will once again do his job and stand up for his constituents.

So let me keep going with more surprises we have in the budget because, like I said, none of this was in the . . . One of this was discussed during the Meewasin by-election, and none of this was discussed during the election in 2016. Booze tax is going up — booze tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker — going up 4 to 6 per cent.

Library funding — cut. And I have a good . . . There's already been quite a bit of discussion about this library funding that's been cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm sure we're going to be hearing more and more about this and the impacts that it's going to have across the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in particular in our rural locations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to read, this is a fact sheet created by the Southeast Regional Library, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they wanted to make sure that their patrons knew how severe this cut is going to be for them and their services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So without headquarters operation, and they're saying that the cut's going to directly impact the regional library headquarters' ability to coordinate services. So:

Without Headquarters operations, local rural public library branches and their communities will lose the following services:

No new materials such as books, DVDs or magazines will be purchased or processed.

No ability to transfer books or other items between library branches.

No digital resources such as e-books, e-audiobooks, streaming music, streaming movies, or downloadable newspapers and . . . [papers].

No province-wide integrated computer system for rural branches.

No coordinaton of literacy programs such as Aboriginal Storytelling Month or Summer Reading Club [Mr. Deputy Speaker].

No payroll system or administrative support. Public library staff will have to become employees of their municipality.

No I.T. support for staff and public-access computers or the computer network.

No guidance, professional advice, or support to local library boards.

No training or supervision for local branch staff.

No special programming kits such as book club or makerspace kits.

Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely ridiculous. Of all of the programs

that they're going to cut, they're going to cut funding for our libraries, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's so callous. I don't even . . . I'm at a bit of a loss for words frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is a newspaper article. We're seeing more and more news articles. They like to quote the one positive article that I've seen, and I think anyone's seen about this budget. But there's literally a plethora of negative articles that they seem to be missing when they're going through what they're going to say for their budget. But here's one. I believe this is CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] news on March 27th, and the title is "Government doesn't understand role of libraries, says CEO."

It would be interesting to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how many members on the other side have stepped foot into a library in the last few years. I know members on this side understand the importance of libraries and the importance of libraries to our constituents. And the member from Saskatoon Riversdale has already gone into that in quite a bit of a detail tonight and talked about the essential services that libraries provide. Another quote from the Southeast Regional Library, which I believe is in, yes, in the member from Weyburn's area . . .

An Hon. Member: — Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Ms. Sarauer: — Weyburn-Big Muddy, that's correct. Thank you. The statement called, or the statement that I was just reading in the paper, they describe it, and they said ". . . the cuts [are] the greatest crisis in the history of the public library system." That will be the Sask Party's, amongst many things, but that will be one of the things that the Sask Party will go down in history for, creating the greatest crisis in the history of the public library system, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Just ridiculous.

But I want to take the time to talk a little bit about this whole municipal revenue-sharing piece, and how the Finance minister on budget day got up and said there wasn't going to be any changes to the municipal revenue sharing. He listened. Again, once again, that's another example of Sask Party ministers listening to the voices of their constituents. There was an outcry to make sure that there wasn't any changes to the municipal revenue sharing. Instead they did something completely by surprise to all of the members of SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they cut the grants-in-lieu.

And like I said already, we don't operate in a vacuum here in the legislature. And when I was walking in this evening to evening session, I was watching before, while I was eating my dinner, I was watching the Regina City Council have an emergency meeting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this budget. It was a very, very long meeting. I believe they had an in camera before they went on camera . . . in camera, out of camera. It's close to 10, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I sort of lose my words this late at night.

Anyways, all of those council members got up this evening and expressed, very emotionally, how upset they were with this budget, what real serious impacts the cuts to the grants-in-lieu are going to have on Regina and on their ability to service this city, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I noticed that there's already been a *Leader-Post* article about this meeting, which is nice because I wasn't able to write down all of the quotes, all of the

concerns that the council members had, but thankfully the *Leader-Post* was able to do that for me.

So I want to read a few of those quotes into the record because it's not . . . And I want to make sure that all members understand that this isn't just Regina that's speaking up against this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's not just Saskatoon that's speaking up about this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's the entire province.

Like the mayor of Regina said this evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he's never seen every single SUMA mayor speak out on the same issue with the same voice like they are right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the Sask Party wants to be proud of one thing, good job — you've united the province in rage. That's fantastic.

Let's read some of these quotes in. Councillor Bob Hawkins: "This is a budget that comes like a thief in the night." I believe he . . . did he run for the Sask Party once? Again, Councillor Bob Hawkins: "This is not preserving funding. This is, by sleight of hand, expropriating funding. What the provincial right hand purports to give, the left is taking away."

Councillor John Findura: "I am not confused. I am scared of the future. Not just of today, but tomorrow. I'm glad SUMA is working on things."

Councillor Joel Murray: "This is the equivalent of using our savings account to pay our monthly expenses. What happens when savings are gone?"

Councillor Sharron Bryce, she suggests that you "Upload all this stuff back to the provincial government. I'm tired of this."

Councillor Lori Bresciani: "If we increase the mill rate, we are downloading to our people. It is very unfair."

How about Mayor Fougere: "We are here to govern the city and we have been dropped this \$11 million hole to fill." And then he suggests that, adding that if a tax increase comes, he wants to see it on the tax bill as a provincial levy, as called provincial levy. I've also heard it called the . . . I don't know if I can say his name without . . . the "Wall tax," Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm quoting so I think I'm allowed to say it that way. If not, I did it anyway.

[22:00]

Here's another one, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So as I said, SUMA is speaking in unison about their outrage over this budget, over their outrage over the fact that they were not consulted. They were not warned that this was going to happen. Many cities have already created a budget, not expecting to have this massive of a cut, not expecting to lose their grants-in-lieu, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

These are numbers that are coming from SUMA themselves. They wanted to make sure that the province had a full understanding of the loss for communities by percentage. And I want to talk about . . . I will mention the top nine, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think there are many Sask Party members who represent these areas, so I'm curious to know what they're

going to tell their constituents. Yorkton is losing 58.45 per cent of their funding. Moose Jaw's losing 49.44 per cent. Humboldt's losing 49.3 per cent. North Battleford's losing 48.39 per cent. Estevan's losing 47.49 per cent. Melville's losing 47.08 per cent. Weyburn's losing 43.98 per cent. Prince Albert's losing 43.48 per cent. And Melfort, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is losing 41.8 per cent.

It's absolutely devastating, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And what it's going to result in is increase in, further increase in property taxes, further increases in the mill rates, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's another example of the province downloading their failing onto other people than themselves. The hard thing for municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is they have no one else they can download it onto other than the taxpayers. They are the closest level of government to the people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they're not given the respect that they deserve from this government.

Like I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's absolutely, absolutely devastating. And this won't be the end that we've heard of council members expressing their outrage and constituents expressing their outrage as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I even talk about . . . but I'm going to talk about it very briefly. There's quite a few other things that I haven't even gone into yet. I don't know how much time I have left, but there's changes, they're making changes to the Wascana Centre Authority's management structure.

They're making a massive cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to post-secondary education. Our universities are going to receive a 5 per cent reduction in funding, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The University of Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, 5 per cent reduction in funding. It may have been struggling to maintain their services as is, on zero per cent increases in funding over the last few years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Five per cent is huge. It's incredibly huge, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's going to result in significantly increased tuition. We've already seen increases in tuition over the last few years, because post-secondary institutions aren't being funded commensurate with their current realities at zero per cent increases. So with a 5 per cent decrease, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's going to be huge, huge, huge on our post-secondary education institutions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I had some quotes because, for example, the member from Walsh Acres seems to accuse us of fearmongering. Those MLAs don't seem to believe what's coming out of our mouths, so even though we're elected here to be the voice of those who are telling us of their concerns, we're supposed to be holding the government accountable. And we do. Unfortunately not everyone on that side always believes what we're saying. The member from Walsh Acres doesn't seem to believe what we're saying, but maybe he and the other MLAs will take it from all these individuals that I'm quoting tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How about a quote from the University of Regina president, Vianne Timmons:

It's a huge number. It's millions and millions of dollars. So it will mean that we will lose positions — absolutely, there will be positions lost. Services for students potentially lost.

We will have to look at everything we do. It will be a tough, tough year for us, and tough to manage this.

How about the University of Saskatchewan president, Peter Stoicheff: "I can't side step the fact that a minus 5 [per cent in funding] is probably the largest single budget cut we've ever had in our history."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, now members opposite talk about how budgets should be reflections of their priorities and stand up proudly — which is shocking to me — in support of this budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, apparently the future of our province is not the priority of the Sask Party, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because their funding is not being reflective of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So everyone with this budget . . . including corporations and Saskatchewan's wealthiest citizens will get a 1 per cent income tax reduction over the next few years. And I think it's important to point out . . . and I've been watching the Premier's tweets and the different charts that the Sask Party's been putting out about how this budget is going to affect individuals. But it's clear that most middle-class savings will be eaten by the PST, which is what the Sask Party fails to add into their chart projections, Mr. Deputy Speaker — the education property tax and the utility increases that are going to happen as a result of, and potentially the mill rate increases, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I find it kind of funny that none of those additional burdens on the middle class are included in the Premier's charts that he keeps tweeting out, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There's a lot there to chew on already, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I haven't even talked about one of the most alarming parts of this budget. And I know I'm limited for time, but I do want to mention the shutdown of STC, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has a significant impact on many people in our province, thousands of people in our province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's already come out in the media. There's already been quite a few people who've spoken out who need that service to get to their cancer treatments, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So not only are we talking about the loss of jobs, of over 200 jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but also the devastating impact that this has on some of the most vulnerable people in our province. Even my grandmother uses this service and needs this service because she can't drive outside of Humboldt, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it's very, very devastating for a lot of people. And what this will do will force families — for those who have families who can — to fill in the void, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But there's many people out there who don't have that luxury.

And the upsetting thing about this is that there was absolutely no discussion of this prior. This came completely out of the blue. Not once did any of those members opposite talk about this. Not once did I hear them talk about it during the Meewasin by-election, although I know a few of them were out — not many, Mr. Deputy Speaker — but a few of them were out door knocking in Meewasin. But not once did anyone, anyone speak about it, anyone.

I'm not too sure if the members opposite are waving at me because they did speak about closing the STC or if they're just waving at me because they were door knocking. So I'll let

them, the opportunity to . . . okay. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite are trying to distract me from my very important speech and it's very upsetting.

Here's the thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not once did we hear about this prior. Not only are they trying to . . . And this is what I think is going to be interesting. There's a lot of . . . and my colleague from Saskatoon Nutana and I talk about this a lot, that there's a lot of aspects of this budget that smell of lawsuits, frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think there's going to be a lot more impact. I bet that contingency fund is probably going to be eaten up by the lawsuits that this budget is going to create.

And I have a feeling, Mr. Deputy Speaker . . . Or what I will say is that it's going to be interesting to watch the wind-down of the STC. They have to be very, very careful to make sure that they don't run afoul of the Crown corporations protection ownership Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have to be very, very careful. And it's creating a very difficult position, a very difficult situation for quite a lot of people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I know I'm limited for time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that members opposite are getting quite eager to get back into the debate again. I don't know why they're so eager to talk about this budget. If I were them, I'd be running for the hills and hiding behind bushes if I could. But apparently they want to keep talking about the budget, which is fine by me.

I do want to mention, because they keep talking about how they're on a plan to balancing the budget . . . And they're very proud of their plan, and they really are. They say it's only going to be three years and then we'll be a balanced budget again. And they don't talk about all of the deficits that they ran prior to this.

But I do want to point out that they keep forgetting to mention that they're still projecting a \$685 million deficit for this upcoming budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's really, really hard for me to take that number seriously. I really want to take that number seriously, but I don't know how I'm supposed to when this past budget, they were off on their deficit projection by \$860 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and rising, for this past year.

So let me say that number again: for this past budget, they were off their budget deficit projection by \$860 million and rising. And I keep saying "and rising," because every time we hear what the deficit is, it keeps going up. Every couple of months it's a little bit higher. So I'll be interested to see when that Public Accounts document comes out in July what the number actually is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If this budget is a reflection of anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a reflection of what the Sask Party likes to do when they don't like what they hear. They try to change the game to match whatever they've wanted to do all along. So privatizing Crowns, gutting — neutering, frankly, Mr. Speaker — our school board trustees so there's no locally elected powers, and changing the municipal funding game, Mr. Speaker, which is going to put all of our municipalities in a devastating financial position.

So to say it: I think it's probably a given, but I'm absolutely not going to be supporting a budget that massively hurts our

essential services, that callously shuts down the STC, even though many people who need it desperately need it, that offload the Sask Party failings onto our municipalities, and that despite all of these cuts still project a deficit that's going to rise to who knows what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and severely impacts the middle class while giving tax breaks to corporations and wealthy. And with that, for all of those reasons, I won't be supporting the budget. I will be supporting my colleague's sound amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Bradshaw: — Well thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm delighted to get up and speak to this budget, *Meeting the Challenge*, Mr. Speaker.

And I guess as the other people do, I want to say a few thank yous. I want to thank my constituency assistants, Shelley Meyer and Cindy Warner, who do a great job of looking after things when I'm not there and actually do a lot better job of looking after things when I am there.

But, Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my family, which I'm happy to say both of my children are now working in Saskatchewan due to the fact that we have a government in power that's not sending our kids out to other provinces to have to go and find a job. I also want to thank my wife for letting me do this. Actually she seems to be very happy when I'm doing this because I always come in, when we're in session, on Sundays, and she's always smiling when I leave the house. So I take it that that's . . . She enjoys that.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is called *Meeting the Challenge*, and it is a challenge with what we've had happen in our resource sector. And I can tell you right now, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, the other side may think that we like to see people lose their jobs. We do not. No employer wants to see anyone lose their jobs. It's a tough, it's a tough, tough decision.

And I know because I, as many of the other people on this side of the House, are entrepreneurs. And I'll tell you what. The hardest thing you can do in business is to tell somebody that unfortunately they're not going to be coming to work. And that's tough. The other side doesn't quite realize that because I don't think any of the other side has any businesses over there. But this side of the House, it does. And it's tough. It's tough, Mr. Speaker.

[22:15]

I hate to see these things happen but we have tough choices to make, and that's why this budget's called *Meeting the Challenge*, because we do have some challenges out there, Mr. Speaker. But you know what? In listening to the other side speak, I get . . . Listen, they're talking about health. Well, Mr. Speaker, when I was first elected in 2007 I still remember Nipawin Hospital had four physicians. That's all they had — four physicians in Nipawin Hospital. They've got 12 there now. Mr. Speaker, the last time we had a long-term care home built in my constituency was back in Grant Devine's days. We have a brand new one in Tisdale.

An Hon. Member: — Bit of a drought.

Mr. Bradshaw: — Yes. There was, as the member from Melfort said, a bit of a drought — a bit of a drought. That was a huge drought.

And they talk about education, Mr. Speaker. We have a brand new school in Hudson Bay and another one in the constituency right next to me in Porcupine Plain. I can remember my son going there to play basketball in Porcupine Plain and the roof was leaking so bad they had 5-gallon pails all over in the old school. Where was the NDP at that time? They sit there and criticize our education program. They had 5-gallon pails all over in that school because it was leaking.

Also in Kelvington there is a new integrated care home in Kelvington, an integrated care facility, Mr. Speaker. And they sit there and say, well we don't do anything in health. We've hired 3,000 more nurses, 750 more doctors. These are things that we've done and we want to continue on doing those things. But right now what we have to do is we have to be very careful, very careful, on the money that we spend, Mr. Speaker.

You also hear them talk about child care spaces. The number of new spaces created after this year since we have formed government will be an extra 6,500 spaces. Compare that to the NDP record, Mr. Speaker.

There are so many things that we can talk about. And I wasn't going to . . . I wanted to talk a lot about this budget, but I just wanted to bring up some of the things, some of the . . . which they have sat there and ragged on us for some of the things they say that we didn't do or are not doing. Like another one I just happened to mark it down here, and was just brought up by the member from Douglas Park, was talking about the education property tax. We happened to lower that education property tax. The farmers were paying a disproportionate share of that for years, for years and years and years. And the NDP always said, one after the other of their leaders said — right back to good old Tommy — said, well you know that's not status quo. That's not on the table anymore. Did they ever, ever lower it? No, they did not. It finally came around to the Saskatchewan Party government to lower that tax. We're adding a little bit back on, but it's just being fair because of the reassessment end of it. This should not be a problem, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing too on health . . . I'm just going back and picking out different odds and ends because I don't have that long to speak. But the NDP looked at STARS [Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society] but as usual they just looked at it. They never got around to it, never got around to it. We now have STARS in this province. And there was a lady from Carrot River who was just flown in just last week because she had a heart attack and got flown into the city for, and saved her life because of STARS, which the NDP never had the foresight to even think of putting in.

Mr. Speaker, when we start looking at the infrastructure that's been done here, when I think of the highways — and our Highways minister was just speaking here a little while ago — when we look at the highways and the deplorable shape the highways were in when we first formed government, we also have another . . . This is another record year on putting money

into highways. Why do we have to put so much money into highways every year? Because we had years and years of neglect, and all the NDP could do is say, well why don't you fill your own potholes? That's the record of the NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, also let's go back and let's take a look at the population end. The NDP think that Saskatchewan is going down the drain. How come people keep on moving here? How come people keep on having jobs?

We just had . . . One of the members here just mentioned about our mining. Number one. Number one in all of Canada for mining, or in the world, excuse me, in the world for mining, Mr. Speaker.

We have, even with this downturn, we're still getting more people moving into this province. More people can see the advantage of Saskatchewan, and they see a government, they see a government that yes, we are in tough times. But they see a government with a plan, with a plan to move the province forward, with a plan to get us out of this deficit within three years and moving things forward. Whereas when you take a look at the NDP plan, do they have one?

But anyways when you take a look at the NDP plan, that last plan on their tree book, they kind of forgot to mention about a billion dollars worth of spending under their promises which yes, it's a minor technicality to them. But boy, they sure like to pick on this one here.

Are we going to provide everything for the people that the people want in the province? No, you're not going to do that. You wouldn't do that. It wouldn't matter how much money you put to it. But, Mr. Speaker, what we have to do is we have to have this plan to move everything forward, to keep everything in a nice, straight line, not like the NDP and not like . . . Well the member from Athabasca will stand up and he'll say, we left you so many billions of dollars, and it goes up every time he stands up to speak. But unfortunately that's kind of a little bit a stretch of what he says sometimes, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing too, Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, we have members on the other side that are very happy to sign into the Leap Manifesto, to endorse the Leap Manifesto that their federal government has. And, Mr. Speaker, we all know that a Leap Manifesto would down everything. Like I mean they will not . . . I don't think they're going to ever form government in this province again, and hopefully they'll never form government federally because, Mr. Speaker, that would destroy not just Saskatchewan but Canada.

Mr. Speaker, they're also very supportive of a carbon tax. They think that we should have a carbon tax in this province, which would disproportionately also wreck our agriculture industry, our manufacturing industry, our mining industry. Oh, what else is left in Saskatchewan? Our forest industry. It would make us uncompetitive on the world market.

We export. We are an exporting province. We have to have a way to be able to produce products as efficiently as we can. Our major trading partner is the United States, and I don't think they're going to be putting on any carbon tax, at least not for the next four years, Mr. Speaker, because their good friend Mr.

Obama is gone and Trump is in there and he's not going to put on a carbon tax. And I'll tell you what. If they don't put on a carbon tax and we do, we're going to be dead in the water here.

Now they don't . . . I've already seen what's been happening with the NDP over in Alberta where they put on the carbon tax. You know how that's been working over there. I was looking at a bill, and I wish I had it here. I'd like to table it. It's sitting on my desk in my office. And the Environment critic is chirping from her seat. I can show her that bill if she wants to . . . on a person that heats their place with coal in Alberta. And the carbon tax, the Alberta carbon tax is just about as much as what the cost of the coal is. Now this is great. In February how are you going to heat your house?

Mr. Speaker, take a look at Ontario, the great things that Kathryn Wynne did out there on her green energy. How's that working out when people can't even buy food? And you worry about some little tax that's going on. Or it's not a little tax, but you worry about . . .

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — I realize that it's late in the evening, and everyone's getting perhaps a little bit giddy. But the member from Carrot River Valley has the floor, and we are near adjournment. So I'll recognize the member from Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Bradshaw: — So basically the whole idea of the NDP is, what they would do is they would throw on a carbon tax if they were here, which would shut down our ag — I'd already said that — would shut down our agriculture industry. It would shut down our mining industry. It would shut down our oil industry. It would shut down basically everything. And we could go back to I guess chopping wood to heat our homes, Mr. Speaker. Oh, that's right too. You're going to have something to be able to make the steel to make that axe blade. Well you could just go out in the bush and bust up some sticks, I guess. So, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that they've come up with or come out with, I really have to question, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you take a look at what has happened . . . And I just don't have much time to speak. But I'll go back to the health system here, which is very important, that in the health system how basically the NDP destroyed the health system, not just in rural Saskatchewan, in the major portion of all of Saskatchewan. When we had the longest surgical wait times, when we had nurses and doctors leaving this province in droves, that was the NDP's record on health.

They wanted to talk about the seniors. They say, well we're going to be hurting the seniors. Well okay, let's take a look at the seniors, the seniors' income plan. We've raised it by \$180 a month. It's up from \$90. Sixteen years they paid \$90 to the seniors per month. It is now \$270. Mr. Speaker, that's embarrassing. Like I mean how hypocritical of them, how to even sit there and try and criticize the things that we're trying to do.

Mr. Speaker, the education end of it — and I'm going to go back to the education end of it just a little bit here, Mr. Speaker — they didn't have a plan, the same thing as they don't have

any kind of a plan for budgeting. They didn't have a plan for growth. They didn't have a plan for kids coming into this, or staying in this province. So what did they do? They were shutting down schools, Mr. Speaker.

We have built 40 new schools in this province — 40 new schools, Mr. Speaker. Isn't that amazing compared to their record of going around and shutting the schools down? They didn't care about the kids because the kids were all going to move out and go to Alberta and British Columbia — and, heaven forbid, Ontario — to try and get a job. Well anyone that went out to Ontario wants to come back because of their great green plan out there.

Mr. Speaker, when we take a look . . . And they talk about people who are on low income. We took 112,000 people in Saskatchewan off of having to pay any income tax. When they were in government, a little over \$8,000, they had to pay income tax and I think now it's sitting somewhere around \$16,000. Mr. Speaker, this is great for the low-income people of our province. But, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am going to be supporting this government's budget and I definitely will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — It now being close to the time of adjournment, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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