



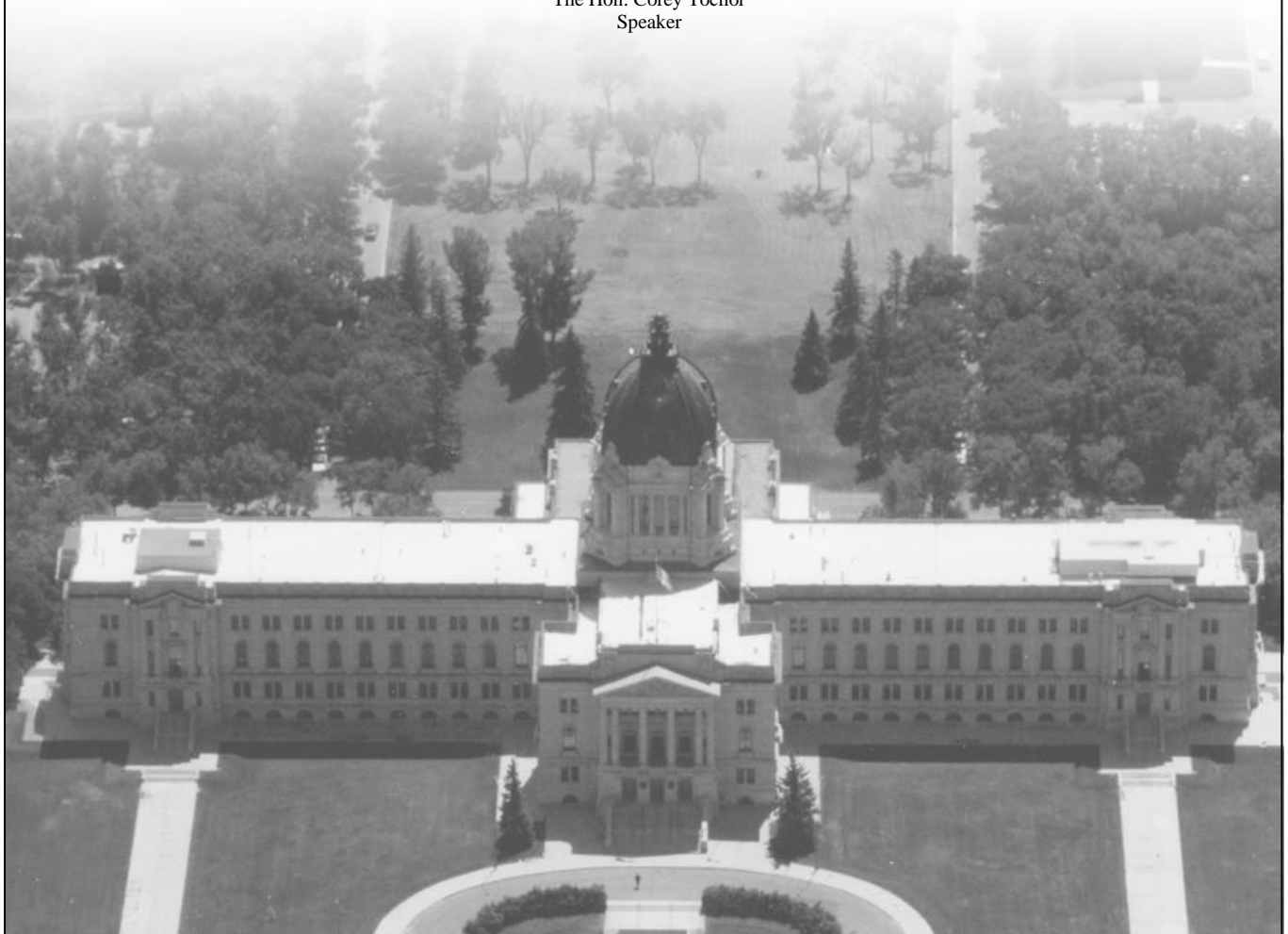
FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

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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Party Standings: Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 50; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 11

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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Speaker: — It now being 7 o'clock, I 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 The Battlefords.

Mr. Cox: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure tonight to join into the budget debate, the budget that's entitled *Meeting the Challenge*, and it is designed to do just that. It is a somewhat different budget than other jurisdictions in that it avoids a massive deficit and it includes a plan, a medium-term plan to return to balance within three years. And that is in sharp contrast to many other budgets in Canada.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I begin my discussion of the budget, and since this is my first opportunity for me to address this House since the last election, I would like to extend some thank yous to several people who are very important to me.

Last February and March we were all very busy auditioning for this job in the April 4th election. Mr. Speaker, I think of it as safe to say that probably many of us would not be here today without the efforts and support of so many people. So I'd like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all those that were involved in my campaign, but specifically to Stacey, Shelley, Gregg, Karen, Dennis, Terri-Lynn, Bart, Susan, Tatum, Lil, Archie, Don, Shane, and Bart 2, and everyone on our phone committee who did such a great job, and so many others that I can't mention here this evening.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my thanks to the constituents of The Battlefords for the confidence they've shown in me. I will do everything that I can to continue to represent their interests here in this legislature.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, and most importantly, my thanks to my family for their support. It was so very special to me to have all of my children and their spouses and three grandchildren with me on election night, and I'm equally proud to say that it's now five grandchildren, not three.

And saving the very best for last, I could not do this job without the support of my wife, Linda. She has been my main support through three elections, two that were successful and one, well not so much. And she is the one that keeps the home fires burning while I am here in Regina.

Every one of us in this Assembly feels they have a great constituency assistant and certainly I am no exception. Lil Robinson is the most efficient, professional and, perhaps most importantly, compassionate constituency assistant that anyone could ask for. She keeps tabs on a very busy office in The Battlefords, and I appreciate all the great work that she does.

So now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments about our budget released last Wednesday. I would like to offer my thanks to our Finance Minister and to treasury board for the countless hours spent poring over the finances of this province. Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciated the opportunity to serve the people of Saskatchewan in our cabinet recently, and I would like to thank our Premier for the confidence that he has show in me.

You know, Mr. Speaker, having gone through the budget process in the ministry, I know full well how much work goes into developing a budget. And my hat certainly goes off and I certainly appreciate all the hard work done day in and day out, not only at budget time, by our hard-working cabinet ministers for all the work they do all year round.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, the *Meeting the Challenge* budget, will serve this province well going into the future. This budget features many measures, controls spending while we're facing a revenue shortfall of \$1.2 billion.

As I mentioned earlier, this budget also incorporates a three-year plan to return to balance here in this province. Even with our revenue restraints, we will continue to invest in infrastructure to support the growth in our province. Total infrastructure spending in this budget is pegged at \$3.7 billion — 2.1 billion by our Crowns and 1.6 billion in executive government capital spending for such things as new schools, highways, hospitals, etc.

Our revenue for the '17-18 fiscal year is budgeted at \$14.17 billion, up 1 per cent from the '16-17 budget, but up 471 million or 3.4 per cent from the Q3 [third quarter] forecast; while expenses are \$14.8 billion, up 2.4 per cent from budget, but actually down 183 million or 1.2 per cent from the Q3 forecast.

Budget 2017-18 introduces a number of revenue initiatives to address the fiscal challenges facing our province. These initiatives modernize and simplify many aspects of the provincial tax system and shift the revenue base away from its reliance on non-renewable resource revenues while ensuring taxes remain fair and competitive. The budget also supports the government's growth agenda by reducing income tax rates for all levels of income and for business investment as well in this province and increases the low-income tax credit for those paying no tax at all by \$100 for adults and \$40 for youth.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said in this House and elsewhere many times that the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. So let's take a look at our record compared to that of the NDP [New Democratic Party] opposite. Firstly, population dropped by 22,000 people from 1996 to 2006. Since 2006, under our government, population has grown by 130,000 people — 17,000 in last year alone according to Stats Canada. That

growth of 130,000 people is something that the NDP said was farcical. Well it is reality now, but what is farcical, Mr. Speaker, is that NDP that will not support this budget and our plan to return to balance in three years.

Number two, under that NDP government, we had the worst job creation record in Canada, and it was only half the national average. Today, Mr. Speaker, we have the second-best job creation record in the country, now nearly double the national average.

Thirdly, the NDP raised taxes 21 times in 16 years, including the PST [provincial sales tax] four times. Twenty-one times, the PST four times and raising the gas tax twice, and still they left us a billion dollar pothole in our highways. And people are not going to forget that, Mr. Speaker.

We now have the lowest PST of any province with a PST. And on the income tax side, a family of four pays no provincial income tax on the first \$50,495 of income. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the highest tax-free threshold in Canada.

Just a couple of other examples here. Even with the PST increase, every Saskatchewan resident at every level of income will pay less in income tax-PST combined than they did under the NDP. Just for example, a family of four with an income of \$50,000 today will pay \$2,366 less in taxes and PST combined than they did in 2007. If that same family earns \$75,000 a year, they will pay \$1,886 in tax and PST combined than they did in 2007. If that family makes \$100,000 a year, they will still continue to pay less, a \$1,951 reduction than they did in 2007.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, from '01 to '06 the NDP lost 450 nurses and 173 doctors, closed 52 hospitals, and had the longest surgical wait times in the country. Today 750 more doctors and 3,000 more nurses of all designation are proud to work here in Saskatchewan. Our wait times are among the shortest in Canada. We're building hospitals in many locations, including the new Sask Hospital, North Battleford in my own constituency. I'll talk more about that later.

Fifth, who is best to care for our seniors? Would it be the NDP who closed 1,200 beds in long-term care homes and never once, never once increased the seniors' income plan for 16 years? Contrast that to the Sask Party, of opening 15 new long-term care facilities and tripling the Saskatchewan income for seniors from \$90 to more than \$270 a month.

Number six, what about education, Mr. Speaker? The NDP closed 176 schools, reduced the number of teachers by 400. Today we have built 40 new or replacement schools and undertaken 25 major renovations. We have 750 more teachers and . . . [inaudible] . . . more students. And I'm not making this up, Mr. Speaker. This is actual fact.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, in 16 years the NDP opened 2,856 new child care spaces. That's fewer than 180 a year. In 10 years we have funded 6,500 new spaces or 650 new spaces each and every year.

So, Mr. Speaker, this budget proves we intend to keep providing the services that our citizens want and need to maintain the quality of life they have enjoyed for the last 10

years. This budget continues to provide the much needed tax reduction to our citizens on top of the \$6.6 billion in tax savings that have been realized since we formed government, and the 112,000 people, low-income earners, that now pay no provincial income tax at all. These tax reductions will translate into working to keep our economy strong.

Yes, we do have a tough budget situation this year. But let's not forget that at the same time, we are seeing some improvements in our economy, and we must continue to facilitate this trend by making the tax reductions proposed in this budget.

Now a little bit about some of the highlights of the work of our hard-working ministers and ministries. With a \$388.6 million budget, our Agriculture ministry will continue to support our farmers and ranchers. We certainly appreciate the value of ag products in this province and the longstanding contribution our ag producers make to our economy, as they account for a full 10 per cent of our total GSP and over one-half of our total exports with \$14 billion going to 147 different countries.

Just a couple of examples here, Mr. Speaker: our producers exported 98 per cent of all of Canada's lentil exports and 72 per cent of the total world lentil exports, just from this province alone. As well, we exported 94 per cent of Canada's pea exports, which amounted to 48 per cent of the world's pea exports.

We continue to support agriculture in other ways, with support to SAASE [Saskatchewan Association of Agricultural Societies and Exhibitions], 4-H programs, Agribition, and other related ag organizations.

Mr. Speaker, we highly value the importance of education in this province and continue to invest in our students. We have allocated \$2.02 billion for education, which is indeed a slight decrease from last year but mostly due to the fact that we have reduction of funds of 262 million required for the 18 new schools. They are now nearly complete and the funding is no longer required. We will continue to support our 28 school divisions with \$1.86 billion in funding.

As mentioned earlier, we will provide \$55.8 million for child care funding. We are creating 889 new spaces in this budget year.

Our Environment minister has increased funding to Sarcan by 2.5 million to continue the great work they do in recycling, and are now adding milk cartons to the containers they will recycle. And this is greatly going to reduce the pressure on our landfills in this province. This budget also provides 164 million in continued support for our environmental protection.

From Government Relations, we are seeing a major increase in infrastructure investment for Saskatchewan municipalities. In this budget, municipalities will receive \$434.2 million in provincial support, an increase of \$29.1 million, or 7.2 per cent over last year. We have also held revenue sharing to 1 per cent of the PST, which was greatly appreciated by our mayors, reeves, and councillors. This direct support of \$434.2 million represents an increase of 192.3 million, or seventy-nine and a half per cent since '07-08 budget.

Mr. Speaker, our health budget continues to be our largest item at \$5.2 billion, and that is an increase of 38.6 million. This budget includes 3.4 billion for the regional health authorities, an increase of 1.2 per cent. Capital investments total 83.7 million, and that's a 17.2 per cent increase over last year.

And something close to my heart, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will receive \$170 million this year, and that's a \$3.3 million increase in funding to provide cancer treatment. And although long-term care fees will be increasing, 50 per cent of the clients will still continue to pay the bare minimum monthly fee and this government will continue to fund fully 83 per cent of the overall cost for providing long-term care for our citizens.

[19:15]

In an exporting province like ours, our transportation system is so important, so I'm pleased to see that we have committed \$1.1 billion for highways and infrastructure, the second-largest Highways budget ever and will allow us to continue projects on 990 kilometres of provincial highways. This is on top of the 12 000 kilometres of highways already built, repaired, or resurfaced. Mr. Speaker, No. 1 Highway, the Trans-Canada Highway is 7 821 kilometres long, so we are nearing completion of highway work nearly double the length of that national highway.

Of note in my area is funding for the planning of passing lanes for Highway 4 north of North Battleford, something that both myself and my colleague for Cut Knife-Turtleford have felt was necessary for many years. Most of that highway is in his constituency, but a short portion is in The Battlefords and this highway is used extensively by residents traveling north on business or to the lakes. And I would certainly like to offer my thanks to the Minister of Highways for including funding in this year's budget.

Our Social Services budget this year has increased by 6.9 per cent to 1.25 billion — the largest ever in Social Services' history. Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to helping those in our society most in need. We have increased funding by 25 million for TEA [transitional employment allowance], 15.9 million for SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability], 10.5 million for Sask Assistance Program, and 14 million for the rental housing supplement.

And now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude — and probably much to the delight of my colleagues — by speaking a little bit about my constituency of The Battlefords. And those across the aisle I might add, too.

Since 2007 revenue sharing for North Battleford has increased from 1.158 million to 2.697 million, an increase of a whopping 133 per cent. And for the town of Battleford, the increase is 132 per cent, from 407,000 in '07-08 to 944,000 in this budget. Our two school divisions will receive 79.73 million in operating funding. Our Prairie North Health Region that serves a large portion of the Northwest of our province will receive 220.4 million, a slight increase over last year. And not to be forgotten, Mr. Speaker, 155 million to continue construction of our beautiful new Sask Hospital North Battleford, a long-overdue reconstruct that was talked about prior to 2007, but it was never

budgeted for.

And this is on top of the \$10 million invested since 2007 to develop 200 rental and homeowner units in The Battlefords. Other investments in The Battlefords include 3.18 million for the town water treatment plant, a total of 9.1 million for our new CUplex [Credit Union complex] and Aquatic Centre, 11.6 million under the urban connector program for highway improvements to the town of Battleford. And as previously mentioned, funding is now announced for planning of passing lanes on Highway 4 North.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government is certainly making a commitment to continue improving the lives of residents in my area. For that reason and the others outlined previous, I will certainly be voting in favour of the budget but cannot support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker. Well, folks, Mr. Speaker, I can say that without risk of hyperbole that this is the worst budget since I've become a legislator. Although the flip side of that, I suppose, is I shouldn't press too much . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes exactly, and hopefully this will be the best budget speech since I've become a legislator.

Okay, well the reality is that's probably all the levity that I'm actually going to get out in this speech because there really isn't a chance to enjoy a great deal in this budget. There's not a lot to be really excited about. This budget came out with the title of *Meeting the Challenge* but that's a pretty difficult title to swallow. I think it probably should be referred to as failing the test. And this a budget that fails the test on so many levels.

You know I was elected, Mr. Speaker, just about a month ago. And it's become pretty clear to me why, given the window that the government had to call this by-election, why they chose to have it prior to this budget and not after — because they knew what was in this budget and they knew how people would respond.

All of this was planned out but none of it was shared with the people of the province. Despite that, despite the fact that so much was hidden, people still chose to send that message from Meewasin. They still chose to elect a member of the opposition because there was enough concern, enough distrust of what this government was up to. There was a clear no in that by-election — a clear no to cuts, a clear no to privatization.

But this government chose not to heed that message. They chose not to listen to that message about no cuts and no privatization. They chose to move full steam ahead and, in fact, they appear to have chosen to shoot the messenger with a deep cut to Saskatoon Meewasin's deeply treasured Meewasin Valley Authority and deep cuts to the city of Saskatoon. Who knows — is there a bit of a vindictive streak in this government?

I recently spoke in this House about the importance of, rather than hitting back, rather than making decisions based on ideology, we really need to be focused on outcome, focused on

what will make this biggest difference in the health and well-being of the people of this province.

We see in this budget, Mr. Speaker, the opposite approach. Here we see a blind commitment to an austerity model, flying in the face of all of the evidence here in this province and around the world that that approach does not work. That approach does not work. Either we're seeing a crisis that has been manufactured . . . Whether this was a crisis that was desired or whether this is a crisis that you've stumbled into, I see a government that's trying to take advantage of a crisis to push through things that are not popular, that people in this province don't want, deep cuts and privatization of services that people don't want and that will not help. Well perhaps calling it a manufactured crisis is giving too much credit. The reality is what I think when we see this test being failed is that a failure to plan is a plan to fail. And that's exactly what we've seen here, is a failure to plan and serious failure.

We've seen a government that's drained its reserves — drained its reserves, drained the rainy day fund and now is pointing at everyone else and saying, got any reserves? Got any extra money in your pocket? We want that too. Pass the hat. Cities, universities, schools, even people on social assistance being told that they're not going to be allowed to save as much as they could before. Going into everybody's pockets because they've already emptied their own for their friends. Now they want everyone else to do the same.

We needed to see major improvements in planning. We needed to see a better response. We needed to see a sovereign wealth fund. Every other jurisdiction that has a major dependence on resource royalties has gone down that road, whether it's 3 billion in our neighbours to the West or 847 billion in Norway. How many in Saskatchewan? Zero, zip, zilch, nada. That is not long-term thinking. That is not planning; that is failing to plan. We need an upstream approach. We need a government that's actually thinking long term, thinking about what the impacts of their decisions will be, not on the next budget, not on the next election, but on the next generation.

And in an economic downturn like we're in, the tendency to scale back . . . You know, we understand that. That makes sense. You're struggling; your finances aren't what they should be, but it's the wrong thing to do. It's a panicked reflex response and it doesn't work.

This is actually the time when we need to invest more in people. It's like having a furnace in your house. Social investment, the way that we invest in the people of this province, that's the furnace. That's what will actually allow us to stay warm in the long run. If you're in a cold snap you don't turn off the furnace; you don't shut down the furnace; that's not what you're going to do. You're not going to pull back on that social investment. In a cold snap, if you do that, well people will shiver and shake and some who are left out in the cold might even freeze to death. But even worse is the pipes are going to freeze. The ability to rebound, the ability to get back to work, the ability to actually succeed after that tough time is so much less if you cut back on social investment in difficult times.

One of those major areas of investment in the future, one of those major areas on which we really need to concentrate if we

want to be successful in coming generations, is in the area of advanced education. Our universities and colleges, the education that they provide, the research that they do in this province adds so much to our current economy and to our possibilities for the future.

We know that the University of Saskatchewan, for example, returns over \$1,500 per person per year to the provincial economy. That's the highest of any of the U15 universities around the country. It's an engine for the economy. But this government has decided to look at that engine and the University of Regina, the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] programs, all of the colleges across this province, and they want to slam on the brakes. They want to slam on the brakes and they want to, in the process, slam students and slam families, a 5 per cent cut across the board — historic size of a cut — cutting into the quality of the education and the accessibility of the education that we're able to offer.

We also saw the cut of the first home program. Now I had some skepticism about that program. I'm not sure that really targeting a retention program on that sliver of the graduating population that's ready to buy a home, not dealing with the rest of their debt, that that was the wisest thing to do. But it was one of, what, five promises in the Sask Party platform? Very little was told to the province about the state of our economy, about the state of our finances, and very little in terms of real concrete policies in the last provincial election.

One of them was this HomeFirst program where people who are recently graduated got a \$10,000 grant to invest in their first home. One year later, not even a year later, that's gone. That's a pretty quick turnaround for a broken promise. Whether it was the smartest plan or not, that first home program, people were counting on it. There are families who now will not be buying a house this year because that was their chance to get in. And there are homebuilders who have less business in that important, all-important construction industry in the time of a recession, who now have less business that they're able to do. They're less able to contribute to our recovery.

We also saw an overall decrease in the available student support. And I think it's worth at this time mentioning some of the comments that we're hearing about what that's going to mean for schools. We've got the University of Regina president, Vianne Timmons, saying:

It's a huge number. It's millions and millions of dollars. So it will mean that we lose positions — absolutely, there will be positions lost. Services for students potentially lost. We'll have to look at everything we do. It will be a tough, tough year for us and tough to manage this . . .

We also saw the president of the University of Regina Students' Union — on this page, here we go — saying:

It's really like the government lives in an alternate reality. They don't understand the struggles that people are faced with."

And I really do think that's a pretty good quote because we've already got the highest tuition in Western Canada, second

highest in the entire country, and now it's going to go up. We've heard it from the University of Regina. We haven't heard it yet from the University of Saskatchewan but it's going to be hard for them not to go down that road if this continues. And at the same time, at the same time as those tuitions are going to have to rise, we've seen the elimination of the tax deduction that people can use for tuition. So you're getting the students and the families at the point where they're paying for education and they don't even get the tax relief. You're hitting them twice.

Who else is getting hit twice? The University of Saskatchewan. And this one is the most egregious to me. Our biggest school, a very important element of our education system and our economy, getting cut 5 per cent like everyone else, but also getting told — which I'm not sure is actually within the government's purview to tell them to do so — but getting told that they have to apply an extra \$20 million to the College of Medicine.

[19:30]

So this government took the College of Medicine's base budget and said, sorry, you're getting \$20 million less. They did that year before last. They did it last year, and they knew that this year that was going to happen again. And if that happened again this college — my alma mater, this college that has turned out so many physicians for this province — was going to be in danger of not being accredited. So rather than coming up with the 20 million to make sure that that college stayed in shape, well, they decided to give it a huge cut. They decided to give a huge cut to the rest of the university by saying they have to push 20 million over. And Peter Stoicheff, the president of the University of Saskatchewan said, "I can't side step the fact that a minus five [per cent in funding] is probably the largest single budget cut we've ever had in . . . history". But if you take that 20 million out of the rest of the budget, it becomes a 10 per cent cut.

And you've now got Preston Smith, the dean, the leader of the College of Medicine, having to explain to the rest of the university why his college is having to take those funds. Really what you're doing, what you're doing is you're robbing Peter to pay Preston and that, Mr. Speaker, is not helpful. That's not helpful to the rest of the university. It's a 10 per cent cut to the rest of the university and it's not helpful to the College of Medicine. That college can't thrive on its own. It needs to have good quality students coming in from the rest of the university. It needs to be part of the research environment of the university. If we starve the rest of the university to save the College of Medicine, we'll save nothing at all.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that's why certainly on the question of advanced education this budget can only be called failing the test, and that extends further into all different areas of education. We've seen cuts to libraries. Today six employees of the Palliser Regional Library, the Moose Jaw library — such a beautiful building where I used to go as a kid growing up in Moose Jaw — six employees gone. Are we going to be able to keep that library even open at all? So many libraries across the province at risk of closure and the libraries in the big cities being told they're not getting any funding. It's all got to come from the cities, cities that have already been told they're losing

money from grants-in-lieu. They're losing money from all different sources.

Mr. Speaker, we also are seeing cuts in education, in that primary and secondary school education, increased taxes and decreased services. I think we have a new slogan for the Sask Party. I think it should be called pay more, get less. I think that would be a more accurate slogan for what we're getting out of this party.

At the same time cutting school supplies, cutting coverage of school supplies for people on social assistance and specific schools comme l'École canadienne-française. Et les autres écoles francophones de Saskatchewan ont perdu presque deux millions de dollars, quelque chose qui va vraiment mettre en risque les services offerts au minorités langues de cette province.

[Translation: such as l'École Canadienne-Française. And other Saskatchewan francophone schools have lost almost \$2 million, something which will really put minority language services at risk in this province.]

You know, failing on education, on libraries, universities, primary and secondary school education . . . You know, sometimes, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, sometimes, Mr. Speaker, it seems like the Sask Party thinks we're stupid. But you know, with these choices, maybe it seems they'd be better off if we were. Maybe they feel they could get away with more of what they're doing. These cuts are deeply damaging to people. And they're not in learning alone.

The closure of, the privatization of, the cut to that service that is essential of STC, the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, this is a service that is crucial to rural people, mostly used by low-income families. Seventy per cent of those who ride the bus live in low income; 60 per cent are seniors; used by cancer patients going back and forth; used by grandmothers and grandfathers going to help out their grandkids — deeply important program just being shut down.

You know, I met today . . . There was a rally today in Regina. I met today a woman among the hundreds who were out there rallying to save STC, a woman who just got off the bus. She was carrying her luggage and she'd just come in from Fort Qu'Appelle. And she came up to me and she said, she asked what this was all about, and we said we were there to show support for STC. And she said she had to quit her job in Regina because she lives in Fort Qu'Appelle, and the way she gets back and forth to work . . . You should listen to this because there's going to be lots of stories like this. She's had to quit her job because she doesn't have a way to get back and forth anymore. And that's not going to be the only one. This is going to hurt a lot of people. It's going to hurt a lot of people in small towns, on farms, and all over this province.

Not to mention the fact that it's going to get rid of good jobs for the people who drive those buses, who service those depots. Among hundreds of other good jobs that are being cut in this budget, over 500 jobs directly gone right away, and we expect hundreds more to come in indirect losses because of all of these cuts. These are quality jobs, reliable, good jobs that families can count on, jobs that contribute to the economy, the kind of jobs

you don't cut in a downturn.

And, Mr. Speaker, the only area that we're actually seeing a significant increase in is the area of social services. And, Mr. Speaker, I'm the critic for poverty, so I had to give a lot of thought to that. But it's really interesting to see how we're getting an increase in the total amount going to social services but we're not actually seeing any more for people on social services. In fact, we're seeing less. We're seeing a decrease in the transition to employment allowance. We're hearing talk of a decrease in diet allowances, cutting school supplies, cutting travel allowances, and introducing PST on kids' clothes — something that's going to make it even harder for the people living in poverty. And even talking about going after people's savings and going on some sort of a witch hunt to weed out those who are undeserving. That sort of expensive effort that bounces needy people off of the rolls and only costs more in the long run.

We know how much poverty costs: \$3.8 billion lost, \$3.8 billion lost to the provincial economy, \$3.8 billion each year and that is only going to go up. And now we've seen the budget, now we've seen the budget for social services go up because, Mr. Speaker, because, Mr. Speaker, they're not actually going to give the people on social assistance any more; they're just expecting more people to be in poverty because of the policies of this government.

Nothing to address poverty in any serious way in this budget. Nothing to respond to the recommendations or even put into place the watered-down version of a poverty reduction non-strategy that they put in place. The only thing I see regarding poverty is the tacit acknowledgement that it will get worse under this government.

A failure to plan is exactly what we've seen. A failure to prepare for the inevitable commodity downturn. Still no savings plan; just a contingency fund, a contingency fund which at the rate that this government has enjoyed expanding its deficits, will be eaten up in the first quarter by taking measures that we know won't work.

Taking measures that we know won't work: deep program cuts and the sell-off of public goods. This is austerity. It's been tried around the world and it doesn't work. It didn't work here. It doesn't work anywhere else. It has been described, this budget's been described as a tough pill to swallow, a tough pill to swallow.

It's hard times, but Rod Gantefer, the former Finance minister for the Sask Party government, was worried that this kind of a budget might be the medicine that kills the patient. Because the choices that are being made today will not improve the economy; they'll worsen the economy.

On top of hard hits to Saskatchewan people, we saw a very strange decision, a very strange decision, and that was the decision to cut the corporate tax rate. If we're going to make . . . This is Peter Gilmer from the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry:

If we're going to make cuts toward the most vulnerable people in the province, we think it adds insult to injury to be looking at corporate tax cuts and tax cuts to the wealthy.

Well whether it's insult to injury or not, it's not smart economics. It's not good policy. It just doesn't work to have the effect that you think it's going to have.

This government is predicting a significant increase in growth resulting from corporate cuts. But it doesn't work that way; the fiscal multiplier on corporate tax cuts is point three. For every dollar that you cut you get back 30 cents. When you do cuts to personal income tax, tends to be a wash, one for one, but in terms of GDP [gross domestic product] growth, only 30 cents on the dollar for every dollar cut in corporate income tax.

When you look at investments in housing, it's 1.5, \$1.50 back for every dollar you put in. In infrastructure, 1.6, and in programs and measures for low-income and unemployed, 1.7. This is the area . . . If you want to improve your situation in an economic downturn and you want to invest, you don't cut the corporate tax rate; you invest in people. You do social investment. That's where the return is and that's where you take care of people, which is really the purpose of this position.

The services they're cutting would help us, Mr. Speaker. This corporate tax cut will not. It fails the test. But perhaps not so drastically as what they've done in terms of the taxes on Saskatchewan people. It's a fundamental principle of taxation, a fundamental role of government to use taxation to curb the tendency towards greater inequality in society, to balance to a degree the difference between those who have benefited the most and those who have the least. It's a principle based on a sense of justice.

You know, there's an underlying value of how much we care about human beings in that, but it's also based on outcomes. Inequality worsens the quality of our lives. The greater the level of inequality in a state or country, the worse the health outcomes, the worse the social outcomes. And what have we seen in this budget? We've seen a significant effort towards worsening inequality.

With the tax cuts from the personal income tax and the tax increase from PST, the effect is that if you're in the bottom 10 per cent of the population in terms of income your taxes go up by two per cent. If you're in the middle, if you're at 50 per cent, your taxes go up by one per cent. If you're in the top 10 per cent your taxes don't go up at all — zero, zilch, nada. The PST balances out the personal income tax cut — nothing. So those who can afford the most to pay, those who actually have benefited the most in recent years, those who can afford the most to pay get a pass. The more you make, the less you pay. Look it up in *Macleans*'s. It's a chart that describes very clearly the way in which at each income level . . . It's a very clear line. The higher your income, the lower the taxes you're going to pay based on this decision. And the low-income tax credits don't come near to countering that serious problem.

You know, we've heard this budget sold as pain for all, that, you know, we've all got to swallow this bitter pill. But it's very clear that some will hurt far more. There will be short-term pain for long-term pain and long-term damage.

Now we've been criticized; we've been criticized, saying where's your plan. I tell you what. Our plan would certainly not be to make taxation more regressive, to make those who make

the most pay the least. Our plan would be to maintain social investment in order to strengthen the economy. And our plan would not be to get sucked into a panicked response, get pulled into a panicked response and do things that will only make the problem worse, Mr. Speaker.

Now I've been urged not to talk, Mr. Speaker, about the relative honesty of this budget. But I think it's clear enough to say that whether it's been telling the truth or not, whether it's been honestly presented or not, it's not smart. If we had some way of measuring its degree of smartness, like a smart meter perhaps, it wouldn't even register.

You know, it's not a smart budget, and it's not a kind budget. It was hidden from people. A month ago we were on the doorstep . . . Every single detail, you knew this. They knew this already, but it wasn't shared because they knew that the people of Saskatchewan would not want this anti-growth, anti-learning, regressive, short-sighted, ham-fisted, mean-spirited, terrible, awful, no-good budget.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to give my support to the amendment because the reality is that this budget is a result of a lack of foresight, a lack of planning ahead. In fact, the only piece of foresight I see in here, Mr. Speaker, is — the one sign of clairvoyance — is the decision to cut funeral costs. Because the decisions made in this budget are going to cause worse health outcomes, we're going to see more people dying in poverty. And that's going to be an expense that this government doesn't want to handle.

Mr. Speaker, I adjourn debate.

[Interjections]

The Speaker: — I believe the member didn't adjourn debate.

[Interjections]

[19:45]

The Speaker: — I'll let the member from Saskatoon Meewasin clarify his remarks at the end. I did not put the question, so if he could repeat what he said at the end, I think we should be okay. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Meewasin.

Mr. Meili: — Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks and apologize for any errors.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford.

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to enter into this budget debate, but before I do I would like to take this opportunity to thank some very important people.

Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank my team, headed up by my campaign manager, my wife Valerie, in the April 4th, 2016 election, which saw us receive 80 per cent of the vote. It was truly a humbling experience to see that kind of support from the constituents of Cut Knife-Turtleford. It also was my first 80 per cent in my life, so it's good.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say just a few more things about my wife — my best friend, my wife, grandma, bookkeeper for my daughter, you name it. But most importantly, most importantly, to the member from Meadow Lake, the Minister of the Economy, my wife does her share to keep retail sales up. She's there all the way, all in.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank and recognize my constituency assistant, Cheryl Hume, for all her hard work and dedication to running a very effective constituency office. Maureen Paron is our casual office person and is a valued part of our office. These two ladies serve the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituents very well.

Mr. Speaker, preparing a provincial budget is a long and trying task. I would like to thank the Finance minister for his leadership through this process. The minister, along with Treasury Board members and all the ministries, have been going hard basically since the April 4th election. Many difficult decisions had to be made, but at the end of the day a fair and realistic plan has been established. So a very special thank you to everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, the theme of this year's budget is meeting the challenge. The budget is a plan that meets our challenge Saskatchewan is facing. Our challenge is clear. Resource revenue has declined by more than a million dollars over the past three years, mainly due to oil and potash prices that have stayed persistently low. Mr. Speaker, our plan is also clear: return the budget to balance in three years while ensuring important government programs and services remain affordable and sustainable.

We are meeting the challenge by controlling and reducing spending, modernizing and expanding the tax system, and ensuring the economy remains strong. At the same time, supported by a strong foundation of base funding that has grown over the past 10 years, this budget continues to invest in the programs, services, and infrastructure valued by Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, over the past nine months our government has consulted and listened to people of Saskatchewan, stakeholders from a broad section of the economy. We heard many different views and one consistent message: take time to make the necessary changes, be sensitive to the needs of Saskatchewan people and the economy, and create a plan that returns the province to a balanced budget. We have listened and we have acted.

While many of the decisions in the budget 2017-18 were difficult, they strike balance expressed by many. Meeting the challenge requires changes in the delivery of services, transformational changes that can be complex and require time to take hold. Mr. Speaker, we are seeing some of these changes take shape in the area of health, education, and social services. The goal is to ensure our programs and services are more effective and sustainable in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget we also taking revenue measures to help meet the current financial challenge, provide greater revenue stability, and move our revenue base away from its reliance on resource revenue. The PST rate was increased and

the base expanded, but at the same time personal and corporate income taxes are being lowered and net growth incentives introduced to keep our economy strong.

Meeting the challenge is vitally important now and for the future. Mr. Speaker, some facts about the taxes after the 2017-18 budget are, Saskatchewan still has the lowest PST rate of any province with a provincial sales tax. A family of four in Saskatchewan pays no income tax on their first \$50,494 of income, the highest tax-free threshold in Canada. I'm hoping the member from Athabasca is listening to that.

As a result of the budget, Saskatchewan individuals and families will pay among the lowest income taxes in Canada, ranging from the lowest to the third lowest or more depending on the level of income. Mr. Speaker, even the PST increase, every Saskatchewan resident at every level of income will still be paying significantly less in income tax and PST combined than they did in 2007 under the NDP. A single person with 40,000 income will pay \$749 less than in 2007. A family of four, \$50,000 income, will pay \$2,366 less than in 2007. A family of four with 75,000 income will pay \$1,886 less than in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, when the tax changes announced in this budget are fully implemented, Saskatchewan will have the lowest corporate tax, the lowest taxes on manufacturing and processing, and nation-leading research and development incentives, giving our province a tremendous advantage and attracting new investment, jobs, and opportunities to Saskatchewan.

When this budget is fully implemented, Saskatchewan will be the only province in Canada with no carbon tax of any kind. It's too bad the member from Meewasin wasn't here to hear that, but anyway. Mr. Speaker, the 2017-18 budget maintains the municipal revenue-sharing formula of one percentage point of the provincial sales tax, the PST revenue. As a result, municipal revenue sharing will be 257.8 million, a decrease of 5.1 per cent from the record funding in the last budget, reflecting the reality of lower PST revenue in more challenging fiscal times.

Mr. Speaker, urban revenue sharing for all cities, towns, and villages and resort villages will amount to 165.7 million in 2017-18. Revenue sharing for rural municipalities, which includes organized hamlets, will total 72.8 million. Northern municipalities will receive 19.2 million in the coming fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatoon, the province's largest city, will receive 46.4 million and Regina will receive 40.5 million in municipal revenue sharing. The budget also provides 42.2 million in other funding to municipalities from the ministries, including grants for such services as policing, libraries, urban parks, and transit assistance. Direct provincial support to these municipalities has increased by 192.3 million or 79.5 per cent since the 2007-08 budget.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the 2017-18 budget, the government has established the education property tax or EPT mill rates for 2017. Mill rates for all classes of property have been lowered. However, because of reassessments and increased property values across the province, actual tax revenue collected through

EPT will increase by 67 million or 9.8 per cent. The EPT change for each property will vary based on reassessment value of the property. Mr. Speaker, the education property tax system was redesigned and property taxes were lowered significantly in 2008-09. As part of that redesign, the government committed to a 60/40 split for the funding of education, 60 per cent coming from government grants and 40 per cent from EPT.

Mr. Speaker, in recent years the EPT has remained unchanged while education costs have continued to increase. The share of the education costs funded by EPT has been approximately 35 per cent. This budget restores the 60/40 balance.

Mr. Speaker, agricultural mill rates will go from 2.67 mills to 1.43, residential will go from 5.03 to 4.12, commercial/industrial will go from 8.28 to 6.27, and resource will go from 11.04 to 9.68. Since 2009, residents of Saskatchewan have seen a \$1.3 billion reduction in property tax savings.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture's budget for 2017-18 of 388.6 million continues to support Saskatchewan's strong agricultural industry. Business risk management programs will be fully funded, with an investment of 264.1 million, an increase of almost 4 per cent. Mr. Speaker, our agricultural industry is a very important part of our diverse economy . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The member from Coronation Park would agree with that.

This budget invests in programs and services that support our farmers and ranchers to drive sustainable growth in the sector. Mr. Speaker, funding of 71.2 million is again being provided for strategic initiatives under the federal-provincial Growing Forward 2 agreement. This budget continues the province's investment in agricultural research with 26.8 million; and for crop insurance premiums and program delivery, 172.2 million is being provided.

Mr. Speaker, the 2017-18 budget includes the decision to end the Saskatchewan pastures program and consult on the future management of the land.

This will be the last year that the SPP [Saskatchewan pastures program] will operate in its entirety. The SPP was originally created to help support the diversification of the industry; however, our industry has evolved as have the needs of the producers. Managing private cattle is no longer a core business function of the government. Public and stakeholder engagement along with First Nations and Métis communities consultations on how the affected pasture land should be managed in the future will start in the coming days.

Mr. Speaker, the 2017-18 budget will see a significant enhancement to the regulatory oversight of the oil and gas industry, a very important industry in my constituency. The petroleum and natural gas division of the Ministry of the Economy, which is the provincial regulator of oil and gas activities, will receive an additional 1.4 million and 13 full-time equivalent positions in the 2017-18 budget. The additional funding will be allocated to the following initiatives: 600,000 start-up funding for a multi-year pipeline regulation enhancement program called PREP to strengthen Saskatchewan's approach to pipeline regulation; 500,000

increase in core funding to increase the number of field inspectors in the ministry's field offices in Estevan, Swift Current, Kindersley, and Lloydminster; and 250,000 funding to expand the technical capacity of the ministry to support the Government of Saskatchewan's climate change commitments related to the upstream oil and gas industry.

Mr. Speaker, the budget also includes 460,000 in capital spending to begin the expansion of the integrated resource information system better known as IRIS to support the implementation of PREP. IRIS is a custom-built online business system that supports the development and regulation of Saskatchewan's oil and gas industry. This funding will allow for web-based pipeline licensing, including flow lines as well as additional reporting and mapping capabilities related to the pipeline regulation.

In addition to these recent developments, in 2016 the Government of Saskatchewan introduced Bill 43, *The Pipelines Amendment Act, 2016*. This bill, slated for Royal Assent later this spring, will provide the legal foundation allowed for the implementation of PREP and enhancements to IRIS needed to support efficient industry regulation.

Mr. Speaker, 90 per cent of the new operational funding announced in this budget will be offset by an administrative levy assessed against the well and pipeline licence holders to accommodate expanded pipeline regulation. The existing well levy formula under *The Oil and Gas Conservation Act* will be amended to include a levy for pipeline licences. Changes announced in this budget, including the amendment to the administrative levy, will enable the Government of Saskatchewan to deliver on significant improvements to its oil and gas regulatory program. Public confidence in our regulatory system is vital to the long term growth and development of our oil and gas industry. Consultation with the oil and gas and potash industries on the regulations needed to implement the changes to the administrative levy will occur over the next few months for implementation this year.

In addition to the pipelines being covered under the new administrative levy, other planned changes include:

- Introduction of a base levy for all licensed wells, with the exception of abandoned wells, to ensure all well owners are paying an equitable share of the cost of regulating active and inactive wells; and
- Elimination of fees for seismic licences and explosive permits since these costs will now be fully offset by the proposed changes to the levy.

Mr. Speaker, the initiatives included in the 2017-18 budget will continue the trend of strengthening oil and gas regulation in Saskatchewan.

In recent years, the Ministry of the Economy has implemented the following initiatives:

- Created IRIS, which is a custom-built web-based business system that supports the development and regulation of Saskatchewan's oil and gas industry and enables industry to complete regularly performed business and regulatory tasks online;

- Developed and implemented an administrative levy to recover 90 per cent of regulatory costs from industry including the cost of expanded regulatory programs;
- Increased the number of FTEs assigned to oil and gas regulation;

- Established a single window with the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture using IRIS to streamline the regulatory oversight of the industry;

- Created a division within the Ministry of the Economy fully dedicated to oil and gas regulation to operate at arm's length from oil and gas investment attraction activities;

- Enhanced air quality monitoring; and

- Enhanced pipeline monitoring.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker:

Saskatchewan is investing \$5.2 billion this year in core health [care] services and infrastructure to meet the health care needs of Saskatchewan people. The 2017-18 Health budget has increased \$38.6 million (0.7 per cent) from 2016-17 and more than 51 per cent since 2007.

"Our government is investing in health care that supports Saskatchewan patients and families by focusing on important front-line services." . . . "Health system transformation and the shift to a single Provincial Health Authority will support our efforts to meet the challenges Saskatchewan is facing. We're committed to controlling costs, reducing administration and finding ways to provide more efficient, sustainable front-line health care services for Saskatchewan people."

Mr. Speaker:

The Health budget includes \$3.4 billion in funding for Regional Health Authorities. This is an increase of 1.2 per cent over last year and 57.9 per cent more than the RHA allocation in 2007. It includes a new \$12 million investment to address overcapacity pressures and emergency department wait times in Regina and Saskatoon, and \$24.4 million in funding to address service pressures and operating costs.

Government will meet its commitment to provide additional funding to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, with a \$250,000 . . . increase in 2017-18.

The province is also . . . [supplying] \$750,000 to begin a human . . . (HPV) vaccination program for boys, expanding availability of the program that began in 2008 for Grade 6 girls.

Mr. Speaker:

Capital investments in 2017-18 total \$83.7 million, a 17.2 per cent increase. Affirming the province's commitment to the Children's Hospital of Saskatchewan, investments include \$15.5 million for the CHS, which will also receive \$8 million for information technology needs and \$4.4 million in operating funds. The Leader Integrated Facility

will receive \$6.7 million, and \$3.5 million will fund electrical renewal projects at Regina General and Pasqua hospitals.

The Saskatchewan Cancer Agency will also receive more than \$170 million, a \$3.3 million increase in funding to provide cancer treatment to more patients.

Mr. Speaker, the \$1.1 billion 2017-18 Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure budget will see work continue on major projects on 990 kilometres of provincial highways across Saskatchewan over the coming year. This is the second-largest transportation budget in Saskatchewan's history and the second year in a row that we invest more than a billion dollars into our highways and roads. The budget is a testament to our government's commitment to provide infrastructure that grows our economy and improves safety while keeping our physical house in order during these challenging times.

This year's budget includes 343 million to start or continue construction across the province, as well as 500 million for the Regina bypass. Mr. Speaker, highlights include major projects to improve safety and increase capacity on some of Saskatchewan's busiest highways. We continue work on the new overpasses at Warman and Martensville, continue work on twinning Highway 7 between Saskatoon and Delisle, continue work on twinning Highway 39 between Estevan and Bienfait, construction of two sets of passing lanes on Highway 5 between Saskatoon and Humboldt, further planning for future twinning and passing lanes on highways 6 and 39 from Estevan to Regina, and begin planning for passing lanes on Highway 4 north of North Battleford. Mr. Speaker, this is a long time coming, a very, very busy section of highway in our province, Highway 4 north of The Battlefords, with all the SAGD [steam-assisted gravity drainage] development and the lakes in that area, so we're looking forward to this.

150 kilometres of rural highway upgrades, including Highway 4 south of Cadillac, Highway 51 near Kelfield, Highway 80 north of Esterhazy, and Highway 322 north of Silton. Repairing and upgrading 990 kilometres of provincial highways, including 150 kilometres of rural highway upgrades, 300 kilometres of repaving, 140 kilometres of sealing, and 400 kilometres of other treatments. Investing more than 53 million to build, operate, and maintain highways and airports in northern Saskatchewan. Thirty major bridge rehabilitations and replacements, as well as the numerous culvert projects across the province. More than 20 million for urban and municipal road projects and airports, funding that is over and above revenue sharing.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to invest in our highways and make improvements throughout Saskatchewan, but we know there is still more work to be done, and this budget is a good step in that direction. However our commitment and track record is clear. With this year's budget, we've now invested more than \$7.4 billion to improve more than 12 000 kilometres of road and highways in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, as Legislative Secretary to Highways and Infrastructure, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize Nithi Govindasamy, deputy minister of Highways and Infrastructure who is retiring March 31st. Nithi graduated from the University of Alberta in 1975 with a Bachelor of Science

and Agriculture. He received his Masters of Science, majoring in agricultural economics from the University of Alberta in 1983.

From September 16th, 2013 to present, he's been the deputy minister of Highways and from . . . when was it here? From 1983 to 2008 he was Alberta Agriculture executive director of policy secretariat. Other positions include resource economist, trade statistician, farm income specialist, and director of international government office. Mr. Speaker, Nithi worked in Malaysia as an agrologist and . . . [inaudible] . . . director of extension. His board membership includes the Canadian Agriculture Hall of Fame. Mr. Speaker, we thank Nithi for his 40 years of government service and he will be missed.

Mr. Speaker, the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency has growth in the resource sector with new SAGD plants being completed in the Edam area. Three Husky SAGD, one owed by Serafina, are all producing oil right now. Husky Energy is constructing another plant north of Maidstone and Serafina is constructing another plant at Meota. Husky, I would also say, has two plants going up at Spruce Lake and along with Serafina with a plant up there also. Mr. Speaker, these construction sites employ hundreds of people, and when completed they have good-paying, full-time jobs. The SAGD process is able to extract oil between 7 and \$9 a barrel. This year with good moisture conditions and resource industry investment, we are looking forward to a very good year in the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a couple of minutes to refresh our memories of the NDP budget of 2004. Now that was the first budget after they won the 2003 election, which I'm sure nobody was more surprised than Mr. Calvert and his members over there. Their masterful, I guess, implication of fearmongering seemed to go all the way. But anyway, their first budget, the NDP increased the provincial sales tax by a point to 7 per cent. It included elimination of 500 government jobs. More than half those jobs came from Ag and Environment. Funding was reduced by 12 government departments. Changes were made to the health delivery which included facility closures and conversions as well as reductions in long-term care beds.

Cuts to agricultural support programs and consolidation of 31 rural service centres into nine rural and northern environmental offices were also closed. All these cuts were especially punishing to the people in rural Saskatchewan. They pulled 158.1 million out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the member from Saskatoon Centre champions himself as being the representative of labour, and he also talks in this House many times of consultation, consultation with constituents and whatever. Well, Mr. Speaker, when that minister . . . or when that member was the minister, this is what he had to say:

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.

But in order to govern effectively, we had to have responsible finances and not back down from these

difficult choices.

That was from the member from Saskatoon Centre. Mr. Speaker, along with the decisions of the NDP, let's not forget what else the NDP think tank came up with. Instead of opening provincial parks May 20th as usual, they decided to open parks on June 18th in order to save \$100,000 by delaying the openings. They also introduced the \$3 charge for campfires which was labelled the wiener roast tax. Now, Mr. Speaker, I like a good hot dog, you know, and this was a real, real test to the hot dog industry. I'm sure that Fuhrmann's Meats or Maple Leaf Foods or Schneiders were not consulted by the member opposite. But you know, Mr. Speaker, I guess different governments have different priorities.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, 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 probably are familiar with some of the numbers.

Mr. Speaker, this fiscal year, non-renewable resource revenues are down about 1.2 billion from the 2014 levels. That's 1.2 billion on a \$14.4 billion budget, a drop of about 8 per cent. That's what we're facing today. Oil has fallen back below \$50 a barrel. West Texas Intermediate and most experts say that the ceiling for the increase is \$60 a barrel. That's when American Shell producers will get busy and bring on more supply. We're not going to see \$100 a barrel of oil soon and we're making matters worse. Uranium and potash prices are near record lows, and the recovery in those markets will be prolonged.

Mr. Speaker, resource revenues are lower and so too is tax revenue from the government. This fiscal year, tax revenues have dropped 400 million from what we forecasted in our budget. On the expenditures side, there are pressures in health care, social services, and corrections, in part because of our growing population. So we're getting hit hard at both ends, revenues and expenditures.

Our deficit this year is much bigger than expected. The forecast right now is 1.2 billion. Deficits at this level are unsustainable. Mr. Speaker, over time they will erode our ability to provide the services that support quality of life in our province. They will put in peril the Saskatchewan advantage we have created together.

We have to take action on the 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 for years, postpone the day of reckoning, perhaps in the belief that somehow deficits will magically take care of themselves. It will take a determined, disciplined effort on the part of everyone in government, at all levels of government, to deal with this challenge. Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment, but I will be supporting the budget. Thank you.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Provincial Secretary.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure and honour to rise in the Assembly to participate in this budget speech debate, a budget based on the values of Saskatchewan

people. As I get further into my speech, you will realize it's an approach that believes our government is there to do the best they can to improve our communities and improve on our quality of life here in the province, as the people of Saskatchewan have instructed this government to make some important decisions that will seriously affect their communities and province.

Mr. Speaker, we can rely on the guidance of our enduring Saskatchewan values of working together to build a secure future, one of co-operation and fiscal restraint. And I'm pleased to say that this budget demonstrates our government's commitment to balance based on sound principles and the important fiscal objective of reducing debt.

Before I continue though, there are a few people I would like to mention and thank for presenting this strong budget. Thank you to the Finance minister, the member from Regina Northeast, and the colleagues who put many hours into this process, with an end result of a well thought out, realistic solution. And I would also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the strong role that you play in the Assembly as my colleagues display their appreciation and passion of working in this historical monument of democracy, so thank you.

[20:15]

Foremost in my mind, Mr. Speaker, my constituents in the riding of Saskatchewan Rivers, and I'd like to express my appreciation to these hard-working people of this region for giving me the opportunity to represent them one more time.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, I was first elected to take my seat in this legislature in the fall of 2007. Throughout these years, I've been privileged to work for these wonderful people. They're my neighbours. They're my friends, and I'm very honoured to continue seeking to maintain their trust. I've met many caring constituents and many of them have made positive contributions to the quality of life in Saskatchewan. Thank you to all you unsung heroes who have asked for no recognition or mention. It must be in our Saskatchewan DNA or culture to volunteer and donate with no thought of reimbursement except the word, thank you.

I would also like to thank the men and women who have worked in their communities across our province, dedicated to Saskatchewan in the work that they do to ensure our safety, our health, and the education of all the citizens of this great province.

A great expression of appreciation to my constituency assistant, Marcus Abrametz. He handles the issues that arise and are brought to our main constituency office. He's been with me for nine years, so we kind of grew up together in the political world. In our Big River office, Jason Beebe helps me keep in touch with the concerns of the people in that community and area. Joan Strube is a welcome addition to the office on short notice and when needed quickly, so thank you for her compassion towards our constituents whenever I need to call her quickly. Cora still assists me in many ways, and also Rupel in the building helps me and keeps me informed of my scheduling. Thank you to Jason and the protocol staff for all that they do for myself and the province. The dedication of all

these Saskatchewan people are a reminder of why I'm thankful to live and work and to have raised my family here in Saskatchewan.

But I would like to recognize and thank my family for their continued love and support. Our son Matthew and daughter-in-law Katie live on the same farm quarter with their five children. The two older boys are Casey and Reid and the twin girls are Hanna and Laura, and the toddler, sweet Georgie, brings it up at the end. With all the horses, cattle, and the arrival of the piglets last year, it's a busy, very busy farmyard. Oh, and also the pup, Lenny, came into the yard.

An Hon. Member: — They're busy.

Hon. Ms. Wilson: — They are a very busy group.

I was rather worried when the full-grown pigs — Snowball and Scratch My Back is the names — were ready to be processed into the food chain, if you catch my drift. But that's a story for another day.

I was a 4-H leader for close to 15 years and now this new generation of grandchildren have entered into the 4-H family. This spring, when I was home on the weekend, I looked out the kitchen window and the two boys, aged six and eight, were leading their 4-H steers through the yard. One was a Polled Hereford and the other one a Shorthorn, so there's going to be a little bit of competition there. I think grandma'll be bidding on the steers at the show and sale in the spring. I usually go in to the Prince Albert 4-H show and bid on the grand champion, but this year I think grandma will be bidding on the two grandsons' steers.

Our daughter, Brigitt and son-in-law Chris, live close in the Prince Albert region. And Brigitt by trade is a social worker and a nurse, but politics must run in our blood as she's currently working for the local Member of Parliament in that city. Chris is a newcomer. He's an Afrikaner from Capetown, South Africa. He went to school in Stellenbosch then went on to England, and then he made his way here to practise in Saskatchewan in Prince Albert.

He also has a clinic where he works in rural Saskatchewan at the Big River Health Centre once a week. They have two beautiful daughters, Ella and Jane, who will have a new baby brother this summer, so there's more love in my heart. My family just keeps growing.

Now Lacey is married to Seth and lives in Yorkton. For some reason, most of the children are in the health field. Lacey works at the hospital there as a speech language pathologist and she deals with stroke patients, mainly seniors who've had strokes and they come in and she has to get them to swallow again. Her husband, Seth, is a professional firefighter and he works with the EMS [emergency medical services] there.

Now our youngest son, Markus, is at the College of Dentistry at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan]. He spent many years in school, both in the States and here. He claims he wants to remain in Saskatchewan and work when he's done. He has one more year, so I feel I'm very blessed that all of my four children live and work in Saskatchewan.

And my husband, Doug, who I've been married to for 37 years, has put up with me and all that I am. So thank you to him. He values the farm and the family and flying. He's building an amphibious float airplane. He has a little Cessna that he likes to fly, but this is his other hobby, is building airplanes. So he keeps very busy on the farm with the airstrip, the livestock, the puppies, the grandchildren. It's a very lively place. But I can rest assured that Doug is our rock and he takes care of our flock, our family. So with his support, I'm able to focus on this place and help out how I can to the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our government's budget is about future, balance, and a vision for a healthy province and a healthy society where Saskatchewan citizens contribute to a caring and creative democracy. It's a vision inspired by our past behaviour and our successes, but faces the future with confidence in a society of responsibility, which individuals in the broader society willingly take personal responsibility and supports those in need. We can rely on the guidance of our enduring Saskatchewan values of working together to build a secure future, one of co-operation and restraint.

Mr. Speaker, let us acknowledge some of the changing circumstances in the province and challenges being faced today. The revenue measures contained in the budget provide increased revenue to our vital public services, while ensuring Saskatchewan's taxes are fair.

Mr. Speaker, in the riding of Saskatchewan Rivers where I represent — a geography of many aging highways that has been acknowledged by this government and have been repaired, repaved, or still in the construction stage of removing dangerous blind spots and curves — a great deal of highway work was completed this summer. And this includes resurfacing along No. 264 near Elk Ridge, 8 kilometres along 120 near Candle Lake, Highway 3 near Holbein, Highway 2 north of Prince Albert, and Highway 263 through the district of Lakeland near Christopher, Emma, and Anglin lakes.

All this work was to widen highways, improve safety, improve lighting, and designated turning lanes, create modern and safer designs, drainage plans implemented, and this will keep our highways safer for years to come. Safer for the children riding the school buses, the tourists hauling boats and trailers, and the long RV [recreational vehicle] units who use our beautiful parks and lake systems, the NRT [Northern Resources Trucking] trucks travelling north and south, the livestock and grain trailer units delivering farm products to market.

We take our government's commitments seriously, Mr. Speaker, and we are meeting the challenge with this budget. This year's budget improved 990 kilometres of provincial highways, investing 86 million to upgrade and repair 150 kilometres of rural highways, repairing and upgrading bridges and culverts, over 30 major bridge rehabilitations and replacements. The highway budget exceeds 1 billion for the second consecutive year.

There is no minimizing the impact of the low-commodity prices of our resources on our Saskatchewan families, businesses, and workers. The downturn on the price of our natural resources has implications on the budget. Therefore we've decided to build on our strengths for a stronger economy for the future, building an

economy that is resilient to energy price swings, and proceed with long-term recovery.

We also understand this economy is driven by fundamental changes in the world market, and we will need to weather this economic storm and batten down the hatches to prevent further damage. However the dynamism and the duality of the economic and cultural vitality of our diverse communities across Saskatchewan will grow and strengthen our province. Meeting this challenge, our government budget provides 210 million in program funding targeted primarily for First Nations and Métis that will benefit the quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I would be amiss if I didn't mention Canada's upcoming 150 anniversary this July. It marks 150 years since Confederation, and I remember the 1967 centennial and all the attention and imagination it brought to Canadians, whether it was a confederation train or Montreal Expo. Our Canadian legacy ties each and every one of us and our families, connecting Canadians to each province.

Other Canadians are getting together to look back at our rich history, diversity, and reflect on changes and challenges ahead. A lot has happened in 150 years. How we celebrate as individuals and families is up to us. My family will celebrate Jane's fourth birthday as our granddaughter has the distinction of being born July 1st. Our budget also celebrates our legacy as a province, Mr. Speaker. With the resiliency, determination, and grit that carved our province into being today, we will still show the same strength to make decisions for a strong future for the people of Saskatchewan.

I've had the privilege and honour to engage in conversations, and also call him a friend, the longest serving parliamentarian as of 2016. The Hon. Barry House was elected in a by-election in 1987 and has served as president of the Legislative Council of Western Australia since 2009. Barry and I, amongst other topics, discuss finances of our respective countries. In respect to this budget, Mr. Speaker, I have found similarities of each legislature.

According to the theory of responsible government, parliaments are required to be ethical in decision making and responsible to public opinion while ensuring equality of opportunity by precluding discrimination and meeting appropriate service standards. I believe our government has practised this work in our budget.

As such, the legislature and its practices should not only be structured to ensure transparency is shown, but also provide opportunities for public participation and engagement, which this government has demonstrated in this current budget.

Engaging with local communities form a vitally important aspect of the budget process as public feedback. Our government has found the most successes are those with public empowerment and engagement. Advancing the implementation of the budget is up to the government, but we need the backing and trusting of the people of Saskatchewan. Those are the ones who rely on us to ensure the quality of life we so enjoy and want to continue into the future. With the good work shown and the opportunities in this province, I feel that we are very secure in the future.

Now Saskatchewan Rivers' investments have been many. Since 2007 some of the revenue sharing has increased quite substantially. In Big River, there was an increased 97 per cent since 2007 to 2017. In Candle Lake, there was an increased 115 per cent.

[20:30]

In some of my discussions with other countries, I'm humbled by the show of respect and admiration they show to our province. Saskatchewan products and resources are used in many countries every day. Ninety per cent of India's lentils and 60 per cent of its pea imports are grown by Saskatchewan farmers. A grain farmer, who happens to be a friend of mine from Birch Hills, sells to Quaker Oats and is in their commercial. Oats is the key ingredient in Cheerios breakfast cereal.

So Saskatchewan's economy is more diversified than ever. There are more than 300 food companies that generate more than 4 billion in revenues. Saskatchewan exports have doubled in the last decade. Even our Saskatchewan mustard seed has made it to the baseball stadiums in America. In 2015 Saskatchewan exports to Bangladesh were valued at over 507 million, an all-time high.

As the world's largest producer of potash, our government is pleased to play a role in helping the global impact improve the productivity of their crops that feed the world. We, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are meeting the challenges with this strong agriculture budget and municipal support. Agriculture research continues with an investment of over 26 million. Rural municipalities will have an increase of 50 million to support their programs of Clean Water, a New Building Canada Fund.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that our government continues to think about all the good things we can do for the quality of the people who live here, all the newcomers that are coming; over 150,000, I believe, have come in nine years. So saying that, Mr. Speaker, I think the good work shown and the opportunities in this province, I feel very good about the future. I feel good about the future for my children, my grandchildren, my neighbours, my community, my province. So I will not support the amendment but I will support our government's budget, and I will support our government's future vision. Thank you.

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

Mr. Makowsky: — Well thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. It's always nice to be recognized, and it's always great to be in Regina. I'm sure all my colleagues will recognize that here, later in the evening, represent the people of Saskatchewan here, west of the 100th meridian where the great plains begin. And of course I'm representing the good folks of Regina Gardiner Park. Just a few quick words about that area of our great capital city.

I notice that the economy is taking a little bit of a hit lately but that doesn't seem to have slowed things down too much in Gardiner Park. I notice for whatever reason, there are new burger joints in that jurisdiction; a new one just opened up. I

won't say what it is because there is so many. If I say one I'll have to say them all. But they're doing a great amount of business. And coincidentally on the other side of that, I don't know if it's complementary or contradictory, there's all kinds of gyms opening up as well. So that seems to be a growing enterprise very much, Mr. Speaker.

So just a few thanks if I can. I haven't been up too much since the past election. We have so many great speakers, so many great members on this side, so I find myself kind of at the end of the list which is certainly fine. But just a quick thanks to my family. My wife Tami, she does great work. She's a nurse and does great work in that area, a very important job in our province obviously.

If you notice, Mr. Speaker, any of my colleagues notice, my hair is getting a little bit greyer and, you know, I seem to be a little bit more on edge. The reason is my 15-year-old has started driver training, and so that's some stressful trips around town. But no, he's improving and doing good. And I can't believe, I'm sure all of us feel this way, how quickly time is ticking on. The older you get, the quicker it goes.

I had the opportunity, speaking more specifically of the budget, had an opportunity to serve on treasury board this time, Mr. Speaker. It's a little . . . And you do as well, and several members on this side. And certainly a bit of a tougher year on the revenue side that's for sure. We'll get into that in a second. But my first time being able to deal sort of not directly but closer with all the folks in the public service and specifically in the Ministry of Finance, and those people do a great job. They know exactly what they're doing. They have a very stressful job, I would say, at this time of year or just prior to this time of the year. They do a good job. So Clare and Denise and Arun and Joanne, thank you very much for putting up with the treasury board and all the changes we make and the things we want to see. And I can't imagine the amount and time, the amount of work that is put in.

And I'd like to also quickly talk about the person, the member from Northeast that I share an office with here in Regina. We're always doing our best to try and use the taxpayers' dollars as judiciously as possible. I've seen his work in the constituency but now on that board also as the Minister of Finance. We're very well served by his leadership and knowledge. He does a great job.

So as we mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, this, as we all know, is quite a tough budget. The revenues have decreased by quite . . . persistently decreased by about a billion dollars the last three years. They've stayed stubbornly low, much lower than what was anticipated in previous budgets, Mr. Speaker.

So we took the track, this government, that you have to get in line with that amount of revenue that's coming in, Mr. Speaker, so and again some very tough decisions. We have increased usage and a lot of our programs are open ended, and so that is sometimes difficult to budget.

And we, as I mentioned a few times before already, that we've had a 10 per cent decrease in that non-renewable resource revenue. That'd be very difficult. I know the cities are saying they're going to have a very difficult time with a one and a one

half per cent decrease in their part of their revenue sharing from the province. We're dealing with a 10 per cent, so that's going to lead to tough, tough decisions, and we certainly had many of those.

I think there are some things in the budget, Mr. Speaker, we can point to, that even in that atmosphere, in this climate we're in. We've seen the seniors' income plan — stability there. Increases to SAP [Saskatchewan Assistance Plan], SAID, TEA in the area of Social Services, Mr. Speaker. Cancer Agency saw increases. HPV [human papillomavirus] vaccination for boys. I have three boys and they're a little older now, Mr. Speaker, but I think that's an important project to announce that was in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Building 21 new schools in one year, Mr. Speaker, I think that's very, a significant milestone. I haven't checked, but that's got to be the most in any year in our province's history. That's something to look forward to. St. Elizabeth and Wascana Plains, not directly in my constituency but many of my constituents' kids will eventually go there in the next few years as it comes online. That's certainly exciting for those kids to open up a brand new school, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to talk just quickly about the Regina bypass, very important project, not only for Regina, our region, but my constituents as well. Victoria Avenue East is certainly a very busy road. And I've talked about this quite often before, but I think it's . . . We've heard from members opposite that seems to be one of their things they point to as an overspend on our part, Mr. Speaker. But I certainly don't agree with that sentiment. It's the biggest thing for me in that project is safety, Mr. Speaker. We know along No. 1 East there are overpasses coming, and people out there have been waiting for that for many, many years. We're finally getting that done.

The NDP, they have an interesting pass with that. Of course they never got it done even though the need was there. It's been looked at for close to 20 years. And when we announced that we were finally getting that job done, they initially had no comment on it, and then after awhile they wanted to stop it. They wanted to stop it. The gutting of that contract would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Folks would still have had to cross No. 1 very unsafely, and of course it's certainly not a billion-dollar overrun, Mr. Speaker, the scope of the project increase.

A lot of people think that it's, you know, 1.2 billion and then 1.8 billion for the . . . or 600 for the operation and maintenance. We'll get it brand new back to the people of the province in 30 years. That does seem like a lot of money, but when you look at other projects in Western Canada, Mr. Speaker, I think it's not always an exact apples to apples comparison.

But in Alberta, there's the Anthony Henday ring road. I did some research on this, Mr. Speaker. It took 26 years and \$4.3 billion. And those are not inflation numbers; those were actual dollars spent. The final link in that, you know, was the northeast part, 1.81 billion for 9 kilometres only, Mr. Speaker. So these things you can't just . . . It's not resurfacing. It's not, you know, just doing the little repairs on thin membrane. It is new overpasses. It is service roads. It's double lane. It's clearing, clearing for double lane traffic, Mr. Speaker. So it's a very

involved project.

Calgary Southwest, the Ring Road piece there, just the southwest piece, 31 kilometres, 1.42 billion; the South Fraser freeway, four years it took, 40 kilometres \$1.264 billion. So again these are extensive projects. They're done . . . These were all done P3 [public-private partnership]. I know the members opposite don't like P3.

It was interesting to note in the Alberta situation, the Alberta NDP chose a P3 route. They said in the article that I read that they're not in favour of that necessarily, but they admitted it's the best and quickest way to get it done. And so that's the choice we've made, and the members opposite aren't interested in that. And it was interesting that there was some debate in Calgary whether it should be all done at once. You may as well do it now rather than pay dollars in the future, which are sure to go up. That's what we did. It'll save, as the minister has said over and over, in excess of \$300 million. So it's all important work for our Queen City, Mr. Speaker.

Now the NDP, they were happy. They didn't want to spend money on roads. I think the member from Athabasca was the minister. They were fine with Saskatchewan people driving down a corduroy road. Mr. Speaker, we're investing in highways in this budget and in the next in the years that follow.

Now, Mr. Speaker, well I'm quickly running out of time already.

Now I heard the member from Meewasin speak earlier. He seems to think that the NDP would have, the NDP would have solved all the problems. If they just would have had that 17th and 18th year in government, all things would have been just, just peachy-keen, all fine. They would have had billions in the bank, solved poverty, all roads would have been paved in gold and silver, Mr. Speaker, maybe a few diamonds in there for the traffic lights, I don't know. It would have been great. It would have been a socialist dream. All industries nationalized and everything would have been great, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker . . . Of course, I hope the folks in Hansard can pick up my sarcasm there, Mr. Speaker.

But you know, you can blame all you want, Mr. Speaker. You can lay blame. Should have done this, Mr. Speaker. But at the margins, we're here now. What would they have done differently? What would you do now? What are you going to do? Show us how . . . Now we know of course this House has its politics, and we want to have a strong debate of ideas.

It's interesting now that the members opposite, even from question to question in question period, within their own same speech, they contradict themselves. And many members have pointed that out. They pointed that out in the House here in their speeches. You know, they don't want deficits. They don't want tax increases, but they don't want programs to be cut. So which is it? I'm not sure how that can possibly work. That just doesn't work in real life.

It was interesting that CUPE, Canadian Union of Public Employees, usually the NDP and those folks are pretty much from the same page, Mr. Speaker. They said when it came to debt, and I'm quoting here:

With government borrowing rates close to record lows, Saskatchewan's annual debt payment costs and the ability to pay for this debt . . . are also close to record lows as a share of the province's economy . . .

So according to the folks at CUPE, we haven't overspent. And I continue, and I quote: Saskatchewan's current rate of public spending is at 18 per cent and the economy is 8th lowest in 36 years and well below its 36-year average of 19 per cent, Mr. Speaker. The rating agencies have weighed in, third-party, national, independent newspapers and columnists have called this a budget that hasn't overspent. It is a reasonable choice that we've made, a reasonable three-year plan in order to get back to balance, Mr. Speaker.

[20:45]

So the members opposite are confused. They're not sure which is best. I think maybe the member from Meewasin, in his speech just recently, laid out that he wants to see a lot more debt. He wants to see investments, as he calls it. He wants to see stimulus, Mr. Speaker. That certainly gets my wallet and my financial position, that gets me worried when they start talking that way, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure there'll be many more debates from that sentiment once we find out concretely exactly what the NDP wants to do, Mr. Speaker. So what they've talked about won't come close — won't come close, it won't come within 100 miles of closing that budget gap, Mr. Speaker. So are they similar to the Alberta NDP, Mr. Speaker?

And I remember I watched *The Simpsons* quite a lot, Mr. Speaker, and there was an episode where Homer has to take the . . . he has to learn about nuclear safety. He works in a nuclear power plant and they send him to school, and of course Homer struggles the whole time. He doesn't attend class. He parties all the time. And when it came for the final exam, he's not prepared. He's not even close. So his great plan to deal with this is to go to the back of the room and hide under the coats and hope everything just turns out fine, everything goes to plan. Go hide at the back of the room and hide under the coats until it's all over.

And I think that's what we're seeing from some other governments. Things are just fine. Don't worry about that massive debt we're piling up. It'll take care of itself. Maybe not by us, but somebody will be forced to. We're just going to keep on with the blinders. We're going to keep the blinders going on.

Or are they like the Alberta NDP? Now I heard a lot of . . . I think the member from Meewasin's speech could have been taken right out from the Leap Manifesto, Mr. Speaker. I think there's a lot of similarities there, Mr. Speaker. And I was, if I had time, I was going to go to my very interesting document. The Leap Manifesto is right here. I was going to have a few interesting things to say about that. But of course it would be devastating Saskatchewan's economy, Mr. Speaker. We never want to go there. You know, I don't know what their plan is, what their ideas are. This beautiful building we have here, we come here for many weeks a year. Let's have a debate. Let's see where they're at. Let's have an exchange of ideas, a debate about ideas. Let's see what they have, Mr. Speaker.

So I think, I think what we have here, tabled by the Minister of Finance, is again a reasonable plan. There's some tough decisions, no doubt about it, but I think that's incumbent upon us as leaders, Mr. Speaker. We're here to make tough decisions sometimes. It's unfortunate but that's the situation we're in, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to hear from the members opposite what they would do if in a similar situation.

Many, many years ago we saw what they did — cut hospitals, cut roads, 176 schools. All of my members have gone over that extensive list over and over, Mr. Speaker. But I think it's important that we talk about their record as well, Mr. Speaker, because that's all we have to go on. They refuse to take a stand much on anything, Mr. Speaker. I think that's good news though, based on what we heard from the member of Meewasin. They won't take a stand. If they don't have any ideas for what they would do or how they would do things differently, Mr. Speaker, they're destined to sit on your left for a very, very long time. And I think that might be a net good for the province, that's for sure, Mr. Speaker.

So I'd say our plan is ahead by a century, Mr. Speaker. We will get through this. People of Saskatchewan are strong. They're very resilient and we're going to work together with them in order to get the job done, Mr. Speaker. I think with some will, determination, grace too, we're going to get the job done, Mr. Speaker. It's been my pleasure to have the floor tonight, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As usual, when I stand up, the applause stops. But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank . . . At the outset, a couple of thank yous that I would like to get on, and the first one is for the riveting speech from the member from Regina Gardiner Park here just prior to me in putting some of the facts on the record.

Mr. Speaker, with regards to the budget that was introduced by our Finance minister just last week, Mr. Speaker, the budget that has been put forward is a plan over the next three years to meet the challenge that we've been faced with here in the province of Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do want to take, as I said, a few moments at the outset to thank first of all and foremost my family, Mr. Speaker. My wife, and my children who don't live at home anymore, Mr. Speaker, but for allowing me the time to serve . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, my wife still lives at home, that she does, Mr. Speaker. But I do thank the effort that they make to allow me to serve down here on behalf of the constituents of Rosthern-Shellbrook. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, we don't serve here alone. We serve with our families, Mr. Speaker, in this Assembly on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say thank you to Sally Fitch, my constituency assistant who mans the office back in Shellbrook and around the constituency when required, Mr. Speaker. Quite a large constituency now; three hours from corner to corner, Mr. Speaker. I do want to put on the record my thanks, my

appreciation for the good work that she does in our office on behalf of the people of Rosthern-Shellbrook each and every day, and the courteous and gratuitous way that she approaches those individuals that contact us each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, I also just . . . Another thank you, a couple of other thank yous before I move on to the budget that was introduced here, Mr. Speaker. But first of all, to the community leaders that we have across the constituency. As I said, it's a large constituency. We have 17 rural municipalities now, I believe; five First Nations communities; 12 villages; five towns that we service out of our office, Mr. Speaker. And I want to thank those leaders in each of those communities for the constant contact and guidance that they provide myself and other members of the Government of Saskatchewan — the odd time even the opposition, Mr. Speaker — but for the most part, Mr. Speaker, myself. And I want to sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, thank them for their support and their guidance that they provide me, Mr. Speaker, not just during the campaign but also the guidance that they provide as we sit in government on their behalf, Mr. Speaker.

And lastly but not leastly, and most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank each and every one of the constituents in Rosthern-Shellbrook for their support, their outreach, Mr. Speaker. And again the guidance that they provide, Mr. Speaker, in the good times, Mr. Speaker, and the guidance that they provide, most importantly, during the times that we are faced with meeting the challenge that we're faced with here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, and one last thank you would be to our Finance minister who rose in the House last week and introduced a budget, Mr. Speaker, a budget that most definitely starts to lay out the plan for our province as we move through the next three years, Mr. Speaker. A plan to get us back to balance, Mr. Speaker. A plan that will meet the challenge that we're faced with here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. The challenge with respect to our resource revenues, Mr. Speaker, and how they've declined, Mr. Speaker, to the tune of over a billion dollars over the last two to three years, Mr. Speaker, a challenge that starts to shift our tax revenue here in the province of Saskatchewan away from being . . . relying on those variable prices that we'll have in resource revenues over a period of time, Mr. Speaker. There's a challenge that was met in a much different way a couple of decades ago, Mr. Speaker, which I might get into in a few moments.

Mr. Speaker, a challenge that we have in the province of Saskatchewan with population growth, with more than 160,000 people that have arrived and made Saskatchewan home over the last decade or so, Mr. Speaker, and the challenge that those people also provide on the services that we provide. And I think this is a budget, as I said, is the first year of us putting forward our efforts to meet that challenge, Mr. Speaker, and get this back to budget over the course of the next couple, the next three years.

With respect to meeting that challenge, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that there's also some investment in this budget with respect . . . There's been investment over the last number of years. And I'll speak to education first and foremost, Mr. Speaker, K-12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education, but we've

had back in 2009 . . . And we all know the infrastructure deficit that this government was left with in highways and health care facilities and lack of physicians, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, and lack of nurses and lack of people in our facilities, lack of teachers, Mr. Speaker.

But in 2009 in the constituency of Rosthern-Shellbrook, there's about a million dollars that was invested in three different school roofs across the constituency, in places like Glaslyn, in communities such as Spiritwood. Again in 2010, more roof repair done in places in Spiritwood, Mr. Speaker, and in 2011 more investment in the Canwood School. All infrastructure investment, Mr. Speaker, that wasn't happening in the years leading up to that. Hafford Central School, again in 2011, received almost a million dollars just from the ministry, Mr. Speaker, with additional input from the community to upgrade that school in that community.

And this in this last budget, I believe there's \$2.1 million that was put forward to start the planning for a couple of schools in the province. One in the community of Weyburn, and I'm certain that my colleague from Weyburn-Big Muddy will be speaking of that, the Minister of Energy and Resources, Mr. Speaker. And the second investment in the planning stages of a school — a much needed school, I might I add — is in the community, in the constituency of Rosthern-Shellbrook and that's in the community of Rosthern, Mr. Speaker.

It's a very exciting day. We had the mayor and a number of council members down to the budget announcement, Mr. Speaker, and they were thrilled to see that that commitment was there in these financial times to have a commitment like that to the community, a rural community in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, a growing rural community in the province of Saskatchewan, to that much-needed school that will be there for decades to come, for generations to come in that community, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, the mayor and a couple of councillors joined us on budget day. I also had the opportunity as there was a video that was being shared around on social media of when the announcement came to the students in the school, Mr. Speaker, by the principal there. And the reaction of the kids when they found out that they'd be getting a new facility and there's planning dollars in place for that facility in the community, Mr. Speaker, was pretty special.

And it makes, I think . . . All politics aside, Mr. Speaker, it's one of the most rewarding moments that you can have in this job when a community and the children in that community see the investment and the faith in the community on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan. The excitement in that room, I think, just makes all of the hard work as we go forward all the more worthwhile so that we can continue to make those types of investments in education, in health care, in social services, in all of our ministries, on behalf of the people of the province, but make those investments in communities across the province, Mr. Speaker. This is excitement.

This is excitement, I might add, that hasn't always been here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. This is excitement that many of the members opposite may not be familiar with, Mr. Speaker. Over the 16 years that they presided in

government they were much more apt to be closing a school a month, Mr. Speaker, rather than investing in new schools. As a matter of fact, I believe there's about 176 schools that they shuttered here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, with those schools left teachers, as teachers left the province, were not employed in the province. There was about 400 teachers that left the province between the years of 2000-2007. We're proud to say now, Mr. Speaker, with that school in Rosthern and the 40 other schools that we've built, the 25 major renovations that we've done across the province, Mr. Speaker, there's now 754 more teachers. There's 164 more student support teachers here in the province of Saskatchewan to work with those students, Mr. Speaker, that have shown up here, the 160,000 people that have come to the province of Saskatchewan. Many of those are students and, Mr. Speaker, we have the teachers in the schools, in the new facilities in many cases, and upgraded the facilities to teach those kids, which is our future.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, a very large constituency of Rosthern-Shellbrook, about three hours from corner to corner, from the St. Laurent bridge all the way to north of North Battleford, west of Glaslyn. Highways are a very important part of our constituency as our major industry is agriculture and there is not a rail line in the area, Mr. Speaker, so everything, virtually, leaves by truck. As well as we have a number of other industries as well.

[21:00]

We have a swine genetics company, Mr. Speaker, one of the largest in the province and quite likely the largest in Canada, based out of Spiritwood, Fast Genetics; Mr. Speaker, one of the larger honey apiaries in the province, just outside of Shellbrook; a few manufacturing facilities, Mr. Speaker. A vodka distillery now has popped up in Blaine Lake and doing quite well, Mr. Speaker, with some of the shows and exposure that he has got all throughout North America, and doing very, very well, and interesting to talk to him at Radouga Distilleries.

But, Mr. Speaker, the highways are very, very important as, you know, many of the people in Rosthern-Shellbrook, as well on the west side of the constituency, will commute to the community of North Battleford on the east side, Mr. Speaker; will commute to the community of Prince Albert; and in the south side, in the Rosthern-Laird area, will commute quite often to Saskatoon.

And again, Mr. Speaker, it's been tremendous investment in highways over the last number of years. And I think of the investment in Highway No. 12 and continued investment in that particular highway, Mr. Speaker. I think of the twinning of the highway between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. And I always think, when I was growing up, as Prince Albert being the Gateway to the North, Mr. Speaker. Well very much the southern connection is important as well, as those products come in and out of Prince Albert from the South as well, Mr. Speaker.

And it was just a few years ago that that twinning of that highway was completed, not only for the traffic volume and truck volume that's on that particular highway, but also for

safety reasons, Mr. Speaker. And we were happy to see that twinned, as it's greatly enhanced the safety of that highway. And I think we're seeing much less fatalities and injuries and accidents on that highway due to the investment that was shared with the federal government and this provincial government, Mr. Speaker.

There's been, Mr. Speaker, great investment in culvert replacement, which doesn't seem like a large investment or a necessary investment in many cases, but I can assure you that we've had some fairly major failures of the culverts across the constituency of Rosthern-Shellbrook, starting about three years ago with the five feet of snow that left in about a week, ran off, took out numerous roads.

I remember one RM [rural municipality], Mr. Speaker. I was quite thankful to have revenue sharing, stable funding at that particular time. Quite thankful to have programs such as PDAP [provincial disaster assistance program] and the emergency flood and disaster reduction program, Mr. Speaker. We had 130 roads that were washed out that particular spring, and we had a number of highways as well, Mr. Speaker, that were washed out. And we invested heavily, we invested heavily in culvert replacements.

Mr. Speaker, I also think of the investments in Highway 40 between Blaine Lake, Marcelin, and Leask, all the way to the two mile corner just west of Shellbrook, Mr. Speaker, heading through Shellbrook out into the Holbein area. And those are much needed investments, Mr. Speaker, as that's a main thoroughway for crop products, both coming in in the spring, but also our agricultural exports that head out of that particular area, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm pleased to see in this year's budget again, Mr. Speaker, over a billion dollars invested in highways and some investment in . . . the second-highest budget investment ever in highways, Mr. Speaker, in the province. And I'm happy to say that there'll be investment this year as well throughout our constituency to upkeep, maintain, and improve the highways so that we're able not only to commute to our jobs from our rural communities, Mr. Speaker, not only able to get, you know, safely down the highways for recreational reasons, but also to get our products to market throughout, Mr. Speaker.

I touched on revenue sharing with respect to the 17 RMs, the 12 villages, and the five towns in the community. Mr. Speaker, revenue sharing in our communities, I mentioned that our communities are growing. In the case of Rosthern, Mr. Speaker, our revenue sharing since 2007 is up 145 per cent; 147 per cent in the community of Shellbrook. These are important numbers, Mr. Speaker. These are important numbers because it was an area that was not funded appropriately, not funded properly by the members opposite. In addition to the revenue sharing, some of the infrastructure dollars that have been provided to our communities across the constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just continue to speak a little bit louder to ensure that you're able to hear the good words that are coming on this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, and how we meet the challenge on behalf of Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

[Interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: — There is a lot of chatter across the aisle. Once again I would ask members, if they want to carry on a conversation, go behind the bar. Otherwise, respect the member who is speaking. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Mr. Moe: — Mr. Speaker, I think of the infrastructure investment in our communities across the constituency. I think of the sewer treatment plants. I think of the water treatment plants, the lagoons that have been built. I think of the hockey arena that was built in Spiritwood, Mr. Speaker, the hospital that was built with over \$20 million invested by this province as part of the 13 long-term care facilities across the province, Mr. Speaker. It's infrastructure investment that was necessary. It's infrastructure investment that was provided, Mr. Speaker, by this government, and it's infrastructure investment that's being well utilized by the individuals in the area.

I think of the investment, Mr. Speaker, in the College of Medicine, in increasing the seats at the College of Medicine that were underfunded at a rate of 60 seats, Mr. Speaker, increasing up to 100 seats now, training our best and brightest, Mr. Speaker, to be doctors in our communities across the province.

Mr. Speaker, if I could, a couple of words on our ag water management strategy and then I want to also make maybe a couple of comments with respect to another topic. But we are making moves after three and a half decades of not changing our ag water management legislation, regulation, or policy here in the province of Saskatchewan.

We're making moves that started in 2012 with the 25-year Water Security Agency plan, Mr. Speaker, was followed up with some online consultations, followed up by the Minister of Agriculture and myself in the day, consulting with agricultural, municipal, as well as conservation groups on what a proper ag water management policy in the province of Saskatchewan should look like. That was subsequently followed up, Mr. Speaker, by regulations that were introduced in 2015 and then — not lastly, Mr. Speaker, not leastly — by some introduced legislation that's before the House as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, the goal of our ag water management strategy that was widely consulted, Mr. Speaker, is really based on . . . The goal is to control and organize our water movement in the province through the installation of gates, through people working together, Mr. Speaker, and it's based on two topics: the first being permission to move water off your land; and the second, that water needs to end up in an outlet that could be adequate, which would be adequate. Mr. Speaker, the ways to do this are through joint applications of farmers working together, our ag landowners working together through conservation and development authorities, the formation of those legal entities, Mr. Speaker, or through the formation of watershed groups or jointly working of municipal governments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that there's continued support in this budget for the formation and continued support for those entities so that we can organize and control our water movement here in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, with the proper ag water management strategy. And we're working very hard to do that.

And it's never without a bump or two, Mr. Speaker. I think my

colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, has indicated that whiskey may be for drinking, but water most certainly is for fighting over. And that may be the case quite often, Mr. Speaker, but very much as we move forward with a properly managed, controlled, and organized ag water management strategy in the province of Saskatchewan, I think the outcome of that is that we're going to find that agricultural landowners are very much going to be part of the solution and managing and organizing our water flow here in the province, and most definitely not, not part of the problem.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to touch on one item that I know that the critic of Environment, the member from Nutana, doesn't really want to talk about a whole big bunch. I know the presumptive leader, the member from Meewasin, had a few comments on it in the lead-up to the campaign, Mr. Speaker. But I want to talk about sometimes what isn't in the budget, Mr. Speaker. And what wasn't in this budget, what most definitely wasn't in this budget was a carbon tax.

There was no carbon tax in this budget, Mr. Speaker. I've stated this before and I state it again, that a carbon tax, a federally imposed carbon tax would be the case in the province of Saskatchewan, that would be supported by at least a couple of those members there. I'm not sure about the interim leader of the NDP. I would like to know where he'd be. What I would offer to the interim leader of the NDP is that maybe he'd take himself and the other eight members, come on over, support the government in standing up on behalf of Saskatchewan people. Leave the critic. Leave the presumptive leader over there, and let's ensure that we don't have this cost on the people of Saskatchewan.

Because what that cost is, Mr. Speaker, if the interim leader of the NDP supports the presumed leader and the critic, Mr. Speaker, what that cost will mean to the economy of the province of Saskatchewan is two and a half billion dollars will be removed from it. Eleven cents on a litre of fuel, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the interim leader of the NDP wants to be responsible for everybody fuelling up and costing him 11 cents more. Fourteen cents on a litre of diesel — I'll remind every ag producer of that, Mr. Speaker.

A family of four in our province are going to see their taxes rise \$1,250. Agriculture, Mr. Speaker, is going to see their costs go up 10 to \$15 an acre, Mr. Speaker, with this federally imposed carbon tax, supported by at least two members opposite, likely a few more. They're just a little nervous about talking about that.

And, Mr. Speaker, and here's the corker to it. All the while, all the while, Mr. Speaker, with that two and a half billion dollars — \$1,250 to a family of four, 11 cents on gasoline, 14 cents on farmers' diesel and all our transport diesel, Mr. Speaker — all the while of that going to that carbon tax will provide very, very little in regards to any actual impact on reducing emissions and ultimately climate change. That, Mr. Speaker, is a fact of the matter.

In an economy such as we have here in the province of Saskatchewan, an export economy in the neighbourhood of about \$30 billion of exports each and every year by 1.15 million people — which is a number that I think we're very proud of — Saskatchewan companies, Mr. Speaker, with that type of a cost

on them may decide to operate in other jurisdictions.

In our province, Mr. Speaker, 34 per cent of our emissions come from oil and gas, the oil and gas sector, Mr. Speaker. Twenty per cent of our emissions come from electrical power generation, Mr. Speaker, some of our coal-fired natural gas power generation. The ag sector produces about 12.7 million tonnes of emissions. We're going to come back to that in a minute, Mr. Speaker. That's about 16 per cent of our emissions here in the province.

And as you can see, just with those categories there — those categories that a couple of the members opposite would like to tax a little bit, Mr. Speaker; tax quite a bit, I might add — those categories are also our main wealth, our main employers. They're our main points of source wealth in this province.

This is what we do, Mr. Speaker. Our \$30 billion of exports, this is what we do. It comes out of mining, manufacturing. It comes out of our energy industry, Mr. Speaker. It most certainly comes out of our energy industry, Mr. Speaker, and it most certainly comes out of our agricultural industry. These sectors, Mr. Speaker, are also known, and this is well known, are also energy intense sectors and their trade exposed around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I would just say this and I would put this on the record. With all of the positive work that our Saskatchewan agricultural producers are doing — and I'm going to get to some of that — with all of the positive work that they were doing, I think it's fair that this Assembly should unanimously praise our farmers, Mr. Speaker, not tax them. And, Mr. Speaker, that's what the members opposite would be trying to do with an agriculture, with a carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, the carbon intensity, the carbon intensity in our province has been greatly reduced. Mr. Speaker, it's been greatly reduced in agriculture due to investment in genetics, investments in agronomy, fertility, and zero till. Much of that is invested through genetics at the Crop Development Centre at the University of Saskatchewan by Saskatchewan people. It's investment in the Global Institute for Food Security at the University of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

But I do want to get this on the record: 12.7 million tonnes in agriculture are emissions. Zero till agriculture, Mr. Speaker, has taken our soils to a point where they sequester 11.4 million tonnes. You add to that 2 million tonnes being averted by pulse crops being incorporated, Mr. Speaker, again out of the Crop Development Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, you add to that \$17 million of grasslands at 11 to 20 tonnes an acre, 187 million tonnes, Mr. Speaker. You add to that our wetlands, Mr. Speaker, across the province. Saskatchewan's emissions, as I said, are 75 million tonnes relative to Canada's emissions at 750 million tonnes. Mr. Speaker, you add to this, you add to this the effort that we're making in Saskatchewan in addition to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, are the investments that have been made on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan in the way of cleaning up our emissions, our electrical generations emissions, Mr. Speaker.

We're all aware of our investment, Mr. Speaker, our investment that is removing 800 000 tonnes of carbon, Mr. Speaker, off a coal-fired electrical plant at Boundary dam 3, an investment

made on behalf of Saskatchewan people to lower emissions and part of our plan moving forward to lower our emissions in our electrical generation here in the province, Mr. Speaker. That will merge up with our effort to go to 50 per cent capacity of renewable electrical power generation here in the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, these all merge together.

I might note, these all merge together, Mr. Speaker, and it's happening already. We're already at 25 per cent renewables, power generation capacity here in the province of Saskatchewan relative to our friends in Alberta. Their goal is 30 per cent by 2030, Mr. Speaker. We far exceed that. We're approaching that number already.

[21:15]

Mr. Speaker, you add to this potential opportunities in nuclear, Mr. Speaker, wind power, Mr. Speaker, which we look at wind power backed up by natural gas, and we're building natural gas to back up wind power and solar generation, Mr. Speaker. As we all know, windmills do not operate on their own as they do not provide that baseload power. They need to be backed up, Mr. Speaker, by another source, either coal with CCS [carbon capture and storage] or natural gas.

All of this, Mr. Speaker . . . and I apologize for being a little rushed at the end, because I wanted to talk about the investments in the constituency of Rosthern-Shellbrook. But as you can see, Mr. Speaker, as all members possibly outside of two can see, Saskatchewan has an opportunity to be very much a leader in regards to reducing carbon emissions in a far more effective way than any carbon tax.

With 16 CCS facilities operating now around the world, Mr. Speaker, we need to be part of this global conversation beyond Saskatchewan's 10 per cent emissions, of Canada's 1.6 of global emissions. This is possible, Mr. Speaker, through our uranium exports. It's possible through partnerships and the knowledge centre with carbon capture and storage and, Mr. Speaker, it's possible with what we've done and shown and are continuing to do in the agriculture industry.

We need to ensure this certainty for Saskatchewan people and for all industries, Mr. Speaker, in the province that employs Saskatchewan people. So while many decisions were made in this budget — and I would say very, very many challenging decisions, Mr. Speaker, in order to meet the challenge on our three-year plan — many of those decisions were made and they were difficult to make. Very much the easiest decision in this budget was to avoid implementing a federally imposed carbon tax, supported by at least two members opposite, Mr. Speaker, on the people of this province of Saskatchewan.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be supporting the budget, not the amendment.

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

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to stand in my place today and present my support for the amendment that's being proposed by our party and to really shine the light on what the Sask Party is doing to the people of

Saskatchewan with this particular budget.

And I listen, Mr. Speaker, with a lot of, a lot of attention on some of the comments made by members opposite, Mr. Speaker. And I say today to them, that's one of the reasons why people in Saskatchewan simply don't trust the Sask Party anymore, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll tell you what I think is a very proper perspective as it pertains to the legacy of the Premier. And this is really important for the backbenchers to know this as well. What happened at the budget several days ago, Mr. Speaker, was a message to the people of Saskatchewan that Saskatchewan's future has been squandered. And I look at some of the messages that we've received from a number of organizations, Mr. Speaker, and I say to the backbench and to the Sask Party with all honesty, Mr. Speaker, that it's not about, it's not about the Premier's legacy anymore. It is not about the backbenchers trying to salvage what they think is important for them to do as backbenchers for the Saskatchewan Party.

Mr. Speaker, what happened on budget day was a very dire message and great consequence for many people across our province. And when I say many people across our province, Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about all areas — northern Saskatchewan, southern Saskatchewan, rural Saskatchewan, and the list goes on.

Now, Mr. Speaker, during the last election as we all know, the Premier gets up and he doesn't hold a budget. He holds an election before the budget. And everyone knew what the plan was at the time, and that was to hide the true state of our finances from all the people of Saskatchewan. The cabinet and the minister knew, Mr. Speaker, and the ministers knew exactly what was coming down the pipe as it pertains to our financial position as a province. They deliberately hid all that information from the people of Saskatchewan. They deliberately hid all that information from the people of Saskatchewan.

Now what's really important to note, Mr. Speaker, is that when you . . . when I hear comments about the Premier's legacy, because we all know the Premier is going to be heading out of Dodge as quickly as he can because he has squandered our future and so has the Sask Party front bench.

And this is my message, my message to the backbenchers. You've been given notes to read from, and you're dutifully following those notes and making fun of the NDP as that's all you probably can do, Mr. Speaker. That's all you can do, because you're given notes to read and to follow. Now, that's a great disservice to not only your constituents but to the people of Saskatchewan, because what has happened is you have given unfettered control over the finances and the direction to a select few in the front bench. And today now as a reminder, as a reminder of how the backbench should get a backbone and start speaking up for the people of Saskatchewan and their constituents, is you're having a growing mountain of debt, Mr. Speaker. A growing mountain of debt.

This is from their own finance book. This is from their own finance book, page 47, and what it showed when the Sask Party government came into power, Mr. Speaker, they had an

operating debt of \$10.5 billion. The province of Saskatchewan had an operating debt, money we owed. \$10 billion is what the province of Saskatchewan owed when the Sask Party assumed government, Mr. Speaker. To the backbench: in a short eight or nine years, folks, in a short eight or nine years, and by the time we hit 2021, that deficit or that debt is going to be \$22.8 billion. They have more than doubled the debt on the province of Saskatchewan in the short nine years that they have been in government.

Now this is very serious, Mr. Speaker, and the reason why that was allowed to occur, the reason why that was allowed to occur — and I'm telling this to the backbench — is that you've got to find your backbone. And the reason why you've got to find your backbone is because you shouldn't be taking care of your own political interest, of your own political interest at the expense of our future. And that's exactly what is happening with this budget, Mr. Speaker. This is what's happening with this budget.

So it's not about the Premier's legacy. It's not about the Premier's legacy. It's not about the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. It's not about anything else as to what you're leaving our children and grandchildren. And all I see on this particular page from their budget book, Mr. Speaker, is \$22.8 billion in debt, in debt by 2021, a short four years from now, four years from now.

And how could the backbench stand up and make fun of the NDP and totally ignore what I think is their responsibility, Mr. Speaker, and it's to hold that front bench to account? And when you have unfettered control to the Premier's office with a select few ministers making the decisions around the budget, this is what you get, backbench. This is what you get. You get dire circumstances like this, \$22.8 billion in debt.

And how can the people of Saskatchewan afford to continue paying that debt while the Sask Party backbenchers continue slapping themselves on the back, bragging about what they have achieved, Mr. Speaker, all the while calling down the NDP? And the people that are celebrating the Sask Party's style of management are the bankers of New York and people that have bought the Sask Party and put this province deep in debt.

And I say to the backbenchers, shame on you. Shame on you for not standing up and speaking up. By simply blindly following whatever the Premier and the Finance minister, blindly following what they laid out in front of you because all you wanted to do was get elected the third term. And you're going to wind up with a legacy of debt, not a third term achievement.

And that's why a lot of people are so angry. They are so angry, Mr. Speaker, at this Finance minister, that Premier, and that government, and they should all be held to account. Because this is not about legacy. It is about debt, and that debt is going to hurt our generations for years and years and years to come. And all I hear from the Sask Party is rhetoric about what the NDP had done 15 years ago. That's not leadership, Mr. Speaker. I'm asking them to desist and start coming up with a better plan for the people of Saskatchewan, because so far you have failed miserably in your responsibilities as a backbench MLA.

And, Mr. Speaker, this is hurting all of us. It is hurting the NORTEP [northern teacher education program] students. It is hurting the Buffalo Narrows correctional workers. It is hurting the northern housing program. It is now hurting STC. It is hurting families.

And, Mr. Speaker, get this. Get this. We're not even in the ballpark to solve our annual deficit. We're talking . . . We've got our debt rising. We still haven't tamed the deficit, because more important to the Premier and the front bench was the legacy of having a third term. What happened after that? Well it's not their concern, because they're heading out of Dodge. And that is a crying shame, Mr. Speaker. Because who's going to clean up the mess? It's going to be our children and grandchildren for years to come. They have put this province in a financial situation that would make the former Premier Grant Devine blush.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what is really also startlingly just amazing in terms of what the Sask Party backbenchers are prepared to do, is to continue propping up that kind of action and to continue defending that kind of arrogance. And I'll give you an example. The city mayors were here today, and I predict that the cities are going to go to war with this government. Because the grants-in-lieu in which they withdrew with no city's prior information or knowledge, Mr. Speaker, this is really impacting the cities right across the board. And I'm telling the city folks in Regina, Saskatoon, Yorkton, Prince Albert, that when you get your tax bill, when you get your tax bill for property tax, do not blame your mayors or councillors or the administrators within these cities, because they did not do this. It was the Saskatchewan Party government that did this to you as a taxpayer for your properties, Mr. Speaker.

And what happened when the city mayors asked the current minister, the member from Humboldt, why they would be doing this? And her response is, and I quote, ". . . I don't think the intent of the revenue sharing is for (cities) to build their bank accounts," she said. Well, Mr. Speaker, the cities aren't building bank accounts. Those reserve funds, Mr. Speaker, were for emergency use. You cannot on an annual basis do your budget based on the fact that you have a one-time savings account, Mr. Speaker. That is not how you run a city. Those reserve funds are meant for emergency purposes, and this government took that opportunity away. You cannot budget multi-year based on the fact that you have some money in savings.

And it's amazing, Mr. Speaker, that the provincial government comes along and they say, listen municipalities and the cities, you guys are not allowed to go in deficit, but we can. We can. The province can. So the cities do their very best, and then the province comes along and says, well we don't want you to have any reserve funding, so we're going to make you use your reserve funding, one-time funding, for one year and then that's how you're going to cover your operating deficit. Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance comes along and says, we're going to have a little surplus account set aside for rainy days, but it's not good enough for the cities.

Well, Mr. Speaker, a memo should go to every Sask Party MLA, that you have driven this province to the brink of bankruptcy once again. The conservatives are back. They have

doubled the debt since they have assumed government. They have doubled the debt, Mr. Speaker. And more so, they haven't even tamed the deficit monster yet on operating year to year. And they're putting this cost onto the backs of the cities. They're putting the costs onto the backs of the taxpayers, of people buying children's clothing. And now STC is also shutting down, Mr. Speaker. And I've listed already all the things that they have done.

And yet today they have the audacity and the arrogance to talk and stand up and pat themselves on the back, but call down the NDP in the process. That is not leadership, Mr. Speaker. That is not leadership. And this is one of my messages to the backbenchers. You have to get with the program, because the problem that you have is that you have five or six people within the front bench that control all of you. You've got to have the proper process in place to make sure that you manage the finances that the people of Saskatchewan have entrusted you with, and the backbench has failed miserably.

And that's why they have these processes called caucus finalization on the budget. They have treasury board. They have subcommittees, Mr. Speaker, and it's all been set up. But so far, Mr. Speaker, what has happened is the backbench have blindly followed the Premier, have blindly followed a few members of the front bench. And this is why today we have the predicament of a growing debt crisis. It's going to be a crisis, Mr. Speaker. And we still haven't tamed the deficit monster.

So as I listen to their rantings and as they backslap each other, Mr. Speaker, and as they brag about what they did, I say to them today, it is not about bragging. It is not a debate on the Premier's legacy. It is not a debate between the NDP and the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. It is really a realization that our future finances are in this critical stage, that it's going to break the backs of the people of Saskatchewan. Yes, we have 1.1 million people, Mr. Speaker, but we have \$22.8 billion in debt in four short years. How could we sustain that kind of debt, Mr. Speaker? It's going to be a very difficult task.

[21:30]

So we ask the question, how could the Sask Party, how could the Sask Party, despite having record — and I emphasize record — revenue the past eight years, Mr. Speaker, how could they have record revenue, how could they inherit a booming economy, and how could they benefit from a growing population, and eight to nine short years later, Mr. Speaker, we are in this crisis mode.

Simply because the backbench did not rise to the occasion. They simply put their own political futures ahead of the tough decisions that were necessary seven or eight years ago, Mr. Speaker. For what? For a political gain and for the third term for the Premier. And guess what? The legacy you're going to achieve for your leader is not going to be one of a third term, but the huge debt load that you are leaving the future people — and I'm talking about the young people, the children, the grandchildren — that they will have to pay that debt, Mr. Speaker. They will have to pay the debt.

And we haven't even asked, Mr. Speaker, we haven't even asked how the P3 deals are going to impact the future of our

province. That as well is the reason why, under this particular government, we have seen them simply take Saskatchewan once again to the abyss of financial ruin. We are in this situation. I'm going to tell the people of Saskatchewan that any tax increases that you pay — property tax, tax on Pampers, Mr. Speaker, tax on meals, any cuts that you see — it is the direct result of the Sask Party's mismanagement, scandals, and waste, Mr. Speaker.

Now can I say to the backbench, how could you sit there and allow this kind of thing to continue? You had the opportunity then. Now the people of Saskatchewan are not very pleased today. Today they're going to see an increase in their property tax. To every conservative member out there that's listening to this particular program, Mr. Speaker, you are now members of the tax and spend provincial conservative movement called the Saskatchewan Party. They have put a billion dollars of taxes onto the backs of families today. They have clawed back money from our working people. They are now making you pay more property tax in the city. You're having less, Mr. Speaker, you're having a lot less service. And the list goes on. The list goes on.

Now let us not forget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, where they started from. They inherited billions in the bank, Mr. Speaker. They inherited a booming economy. They inherited a growing population, Mr. Speaker. A short eight or nine years later, and where are we now? They have sold Crown after Crown after Crown, and they're still going to continue doing that particular work. And yet despite, despite all the largesse that they inherited, Mr. Speaker, in terms of money and opportunity, why are we broke? After selling the Crowns, why are we broke? After all the tax increases that they have, Mr. Speaker, they put in place a few short days ago, we're still going to be broke for the next three years.

So you tell me, who failed here? Was it the voter that failed the people of Saskatchewan by trusting the Sask Party? The voters are never wrong, Mr. Speaker. The voters were betrayed. And they're betrayed by a system that collapsed around a power base that is called the Premier's office, and three or four chosen cabinet folks that made a decision around the budget. And I would dare say that 60 or 70 per cent of the backbench didn't even know what was in the budget the few months before the budget was unveiled. I would dare say, Mr. Speaker, that's probably close to the truth. And today now the backbenchers stand up, they stand up in their place. They have prepared notes that they have to read from and they ignore the hurt and harm it does to their constituents back in their home riding, Mr. Speaker.

But people, people have had enough. I think this budget really sends a solid message, Mr. Speaker, that this party, the Saskatchewan Party, they have broken our province. They have broken our province. And I would say to them, I would say to them, just as an example . . . This is an example, Mr. Speaker, and this is from the *Leader-Post*. I would say to them, Regina, you're now losing almost 30 per cent of dollars in the province that you have to come up to tax or property tax increases. Saskatoon, almost 27 per cent more of the operating of the city of Saskatoon will now have to come from increased property taxes. For Yorkton, it's 58 per cent. Yorkton's getting especially hit hard. Moose Jaw, it's 50 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For Weyburn, it's 44 per cent, Mr. Speaker. P.A.

[Prince Albert], it's 44 per cent as well, and for North Battleford, 49 per cent; for Melfort, 41 per cent.

These are all increases that the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* . . . There's no NDP sign here, Mr. Speaker. The *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* have reported those are the property tax increases that the people in those cities will now have to cover out of their own pockets, out of their own pockets, thanks to the Sask Party's mismanagement, scandal, and waste, Mr. Speaker.

So there's no question in my mind. It is no question in my mind that the mature and solid backbenchers would get up and say, yes, we have followed long enough, that it's time for them to speak up. Because what's going to happen, Mr. Speaker, is that every single one of their names will be entered on record as the people that sat on their hands, that sat on their hands, while the Premier and a select few members of the front bench put this province in definite ruin. Every single one of their names will be recorded, Mr. Speaker. And the legacy that they'll leave behind, every single member, we're going to make sure that their names are recorded for history, Mr. Speaker, every single one of them.

Remember the following words to describe the Sask Party. Trying to blame the cities for municipal tax increases; it was the Sask Party. Neutering the school divisions, not giving them any authority, any powers; it was the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. Penalizing families through unfair taxation; it was the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. Selling the Crowns; it was the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. All the property, all the tax increases today; it is the Sask Party. Mismanagement, Mr. Speaker, mismanagement galore; it was the Sask Party. Waste, Mr. Speaker, it was the Sask Party. We have all those examples of how they wasted opportunity. Scandals, Mr. Speaker, that is the Sask Party record.

So as you remember the Sask Party, remember those words because, Mr. Speaker, they have hurt our province long enough. And the worst part of this all, Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset of my address, is that before the last election, the Premier called an election before the budget. And when people asked me for my response, I said the first thing that does not come to my mind is the word "courage." I think the people of Saskatchewan needed the truth before the last election, not a year after the election.

And now the truth is coming out, and the people of Saskatchewan feel betrayed. They feel angered. And everywhere you go, whether it is the school divisions who are being neutered, or the people in the cities that have to pay more for their property tax because of mismanagement, or the future generations, our children and grandchildren, Mr. Speaker. They're going to pay for the schemes devised by the Saskatchewan Party caucus, including the Premier and the cabinet ministers. They are going to pay for that mismanagement, scandal, and waste.

And I say to the backbench, that time for you to wake up because you're going to continue along the debt to continue ballooning. And the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is the people that are leading you right now, they have no plans to stick around and help clean up this mess. Instead they sit there day after day, spout out the same nonsense, talk about how

great they were and how bad the NDP are, and they think that's good enough for the people of Saskatchewan. I say to them, they should stop insulting the people of Saskatchewan with that kind of silly rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, and start doing their jobs as members of the Sask Party government and really protect the people of Saskatchewan's interest, not their own political hides, Mr. Speaker.

And that's why day after day, as an opposition members, we stand. There's 11 of us strong today, thanks to the most recent election of my colleague from Saskatoon Meewasin, Mr. Speaker. We do have a plan. We do have a plan. And I'll tell you, our plan is radically different, much more well thought out than the Saskatchewan Party could ever figure out.

And I say to them, to all the backbenchers who are given notes and they're told, read these notes and don't deviate from these notes, I think it's time that you stand up. You stand up for your constituents. You stand up for your grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. Because I don't want to leave them a legacy of debt, and that's all I see from the Sask Party, Mr. Speaker. That's all I see from them.

And some of these Crowns, some of these Crowns that are out that they're trying to sell — STC being one of them; next on the chopping block is the SaskTel, Mr. Speaker. And you look at all of these issues.

And the member from Humboldt laughs in her seat, Mr. Speaker. That's the same member who stood idly by as there was a faulty furnace in one of the old folks' home in Humboldt that claimed three lives. Now, Mr. Speaker, is that a default? Is that a default in the system, making sure that some of these facilities are kept in top-notch? Well I think there was some negligence, Mr. Speaker, in that regard.

So today, today I'm talking about the future of the finances of our province, and it's going to have dramatic, negative effects for years and years and years to come. And the last people that'll be held to account are the ones that I think are going to be heading out of Dodge pretty soon, and that's probably half the Sask Party caucus across the way. They will not be here answering the call when it comes to tough measures required to reclaim the financial strength of our province.

And today, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing evidence for the first time, evidence that the finances of the province of Saskatchewan are as dire as they are today. A year ago, nothing was reported, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the election, no mention of selling off STC. Prior to the election, nothing on NORTEP, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the election, nothing on taxation. Prior to the election, nothing on withholding any grants-in-lieu from our cities, and we're seeing massive increases.

How do you budget a city's budget with 49 per cent less dollars from the grants-in-lieu income, Mr. Speaker? It's just simply not possible. It is a very difficult situation. So it's not a laughing matter. It is not a laughing matter. There's going to be a lot of people hurt by this budget. We're talking about everybody from the cleaning staff in this building to the STC employees. We're talking to people whose jobs were contracted out under the Sask Party.

And, Mr. Speaker, the worst part of it all, the worst part of all is the people of Saskatchewan trusted them and that trust was betrayed. That trust was betrayed. And that's why I say under Bill 40 . . . And any efforts, any efforts to sell the Crowns, I think we should have an election on that and see how well the Sask Party do then, and see how much they brag then, Mr. Speaker. They will not do it because Bill 40, Bill 40 says they don't have to have a plebiscite or a public vote.

Well I think they should not lose the second opportunity to have courage. And let's go back to the people of Saskatchewan. Let's ask them for their endorsement of this budget. Let's ask them about the future of our Crowns. Let's ask them about having information around the bypass, Mr. Speaker. These are basic things I think the people of Saskatchewan ought to know.

And when I knew, Mr. Speaker, and when I lost confidence on that day that the budget and all the betrayal that was so evident, Mr. Speaker, all the betrayal that was so evident, Mr. Speaker, when we asked information on the Regina bypass. The costs started off at 400 million. Now it's almost 2 billion. What does the opposition want? The opposition wants an account. Where did the money go? How much money did we spend on the bypass? Who got the money? Who got the contracts? Who got the work? Two billion dollars on a 40 kilometre bypass, Mr. Speaker. Even with the overpasses, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out it shouldn't be \$2 billion. So where did the money go? And that's why we've been asking on this side of the House.

And the response we get when we ask for detail, information about how the bypass is being paid for and who's being paid for what, Mr. Speaker, is we got a response from the government saying, oh, it's proprietary interest of the company or the corporation overseas, we can't disclose that. Well, Mr. Speaker, how about the people of Saskatchewan's interest? How about the taxpayers of Saskatchewan who are going to be paying that for years and years and years to come?

The P3 schemes designed by the Sask Party, we're going to be paying for that for years and years and years to come. I'm hearing figures that 90 or \$60 million on maintenance alone. And some of these new schools for the first seven or eight years? Well if they're new schools, if they're new schools, why are we so rich in the maintenance, Mr. Speaker? These are private sweetheart deals that will forever cost the people of Saskatchewan tons of money. They'll forever cost people of Saskatchewan tons of money.

And when our caucus stood up, Mr. Speaker, on the day of the budget and we agreed, we agreed to take a cut in our pay. And, Mr. Speaker, we stood by our leader and we said, we will take a cut in pay. That was an easy thing for the MLAs and the opposition to do.

[21:45]

But what they tried to do, Mr. Speaker, and I think the media got a hold of this, what they tried to do is . . . The opposition said, if you can cut and amalgamate school divisions, if you can cut and amalgamate health districts, then why don't you amalgamate constituencies and let's have five less MLAs? That was the proposal we had in the opposition. So we'll take the

check on the pay cut. We'll check that; we agree with that. Let's do five less MLAs.

All of a sudden the Sask Party started playing games. And the reason why, Mr. Speaker, is I think we do have too many MLAs in Saskatchewan. So if you can cut back workers, you can cut back school divisions, you can cut back on teachers' contracts, you can claw back people that work for the government — three and a half per cent, and we were agreeing to do our part as well — well shouldn't you cut back on the number of MLAs as well, Mr. Speaker? Well the Sask Party would not do that.

Instead they made up this silly little bill, put a silly little argument in front of the media, Mr. Speaker, and once again the games will be played. And that's why on this side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I say to the people that were negatively affected by this budget: the people that lost their jobs; the people that lost hope, Mr. Speaker; the people that continually see that Saskatchewan's future is bleak and grim because the Sask Party couldn't figure out how to take such opportunity that they inherited and build it for a lasting future, Mr. Speaker. Instead all they have left us is a legacy of debt. It's a legacy of debt, Mr. Speaker.

And I'll end on this point because obviously I'm not going to support their budget. I'm going to support the amendment, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to end on this point, Mr. Speaker: that if you think that people do not watch what goes on in the Assembly, a lot of people do. A lot of people do. There are serious consequences in this bill for a lot of sectors of our province.

We are a landlocked province. We have counted on agriculture as our mainstay in the economy for years. We need to diversify our economy to the extent it has never been diversified before. And I said it before: based on what I see from the Sask Party, all of them collectively crossing their fingers and toes, hoping, hoping, Mr. Speaker, that the commodity prices will rebound astronomically, Mr. Speaker, well I tell the people of Saskatchewan, that is not a plan that we support in the opposition.

There's got to be some very good thinking, Mr. Speaker. There's got to be some learned people that could give advice to the politicians as opposed to the politicians deciding what happens to our future. And this is the reason why I made the earlier preface, Mr. Speaker, to my argument is the sense that if you allow unfettered control and decision making by a select few, then the systems of accountability become . . . are deteriorated, and the whole notion of properly managing our finances, the whole system that's set up to do that, Mr. Speaker, gets compromised.

And that's why we're in the state that we're at today, Mr. Speaker. We see this happening time and time again. Each and every year the Sask Party has had their control of the finance of this province, we have seen each and every year our debt rise by what . . . 1 billion. And I think, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Saskatchewan cannot afford that anymore. And I say to them, join us; let's get rid of the Sask Party.

There's going to be some tough days ahead for Saskatchewan, very tough days, but let me assure you and tell the people of

Saskatchewan that a lot of people are angry. And I think they have had enough. So on that point, Mr. Speaker, I will stand in my place. I will be supporting the amendment and stand proudly against the deficit finance budget being presented by the Sask Party.

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in the House to speak on behalf of the constituents of Cannington. And listening to the member previous to me, he was commenting on, you know, we only wanted to be here for the third election. Well I'd like to point out to that individual member that I just ran in my seventh successful election and every time my percentages have gone up, Mr. Speaker.

But that has happened with the support of my family, Mr. Speaker. It has happened with the support of my CA [constituency assistant]. My CA has been working in that office for as long as I have, Mr. Speaker. In fact she was part of my nomination team before the election even happened, Mr. Speaker. And the constituents of Cannington have supported me very faithfully and very well since 1991. And I met with them about this budget, and I will tell you some of the things that they had to say later on in my speech.

But in listening to the members opposite today, the member from Saskatoon Meewasin was speaking about a woman from Fort Qu'Appelle who, because we have discontinued STC, can't get to work now and she had to quit. Every day she rode the bus, which I find somewhat surprising, Mr. Speaker, since the buses are still running. Why did this woman quit already? Because that's what the member from Meewasin said: this woman had quit her job because STC had been sold. STC . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The member for Saskatoon Centre, the buses will continue to run until May 31st. So why is she quitting her job now?

So I thought, okay, you know, it is possible that somebody rides the bus from Fort Qu'Appelle to Regina every day for their job. So I went online. When does the bus run from Fort Qu'Appelle, and when does it leave Regina to get back there? Well it leaves Fort Qu'Appelle at 11:05 a.m. every day, arrives in Regina at noon, departs Regina at 6:30 p.m. So what kind of a job do you have that, unless it's at the bus depot, starts at noon when the bus gets there, and six and a half hours later, your job is over and you go home? This job must be a very unique job or perhaps that job doesn't exist.

So, Mr. Speaker, so I looked up at what this fare was — return trip Fort Qu'Appelle to Regina, \$37.70. So the lady rides the bus every day, returns to Fort Qu'Appelle. She pays 37.70, and we pay \$190. The taxpayer pays \$190. But assuming this lady rides the bus every day, she could get a frequent rider card, which would give her a 20 per cent discount. So she would pay \$30.20, but unfortunately the taxpayer doesn't get a frequent rider discount and we still have to pay \$190 a day for the lady to ride the bus.

So how much money would you have to earn to make a tax payment of \$190 a day? Well it would work out to about \$1,500

for your six-and-a-half-hour workday. That's what you would have to make every day to make the taxes up for \$190 a day . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The member from Saskatoon Centre, she has to take time off for lunch, so you know, we should maybe shorten that up to five, to five and a half hours a day, you know, so . . . Maybe it's a union job. I don't know.

So, Mr. Speaker, STC has been a money-losing proposition since 1979. I remember back in the mid-1990s at committee asking the president of the day of STC: what is the long-term goal for your company, STC, this year? And his response was, to lose 98 cents a passenger mile. That was his goal that year.

Now I don't know how many business people, if you asked them what their long-term goal is, is to lose money every day. But the members opposite, in their wisdom and their business acumen, believe losing money every day is the way to do it. So, Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder that they have a shrinking caucus rather than a growing one.

So, Mr. Speaker, I look at my own constituency. Received a phone call from one person about STC. And this person phoned to say that there was an elderly lady in one community who used the bus once a month to come into Regina and because of that, we should keep STC. So her fare was . . . I did write it down here some place. Let me look it up. Here, yes, her fare to come to Regina and back from Carnduff return was \$85.90. You know, I don't know if she would qualify for the frequent rider discount, but again it cost the taxpayers of this province \$190 every time she got on to the bus.

You know, and if you live in Carnduff or Oxbow or Alameda, maybe Frobisher, you know, you might use the bus. But I've got a lot of other communities in the Cannington constituency who haven't had STC ever, and they also have a lot of seniors in those communities. And you know what? Those seniors make it into medical appointments in Regina every time they have to go. There's an entrepreneur in their community that perhaps gives them a ride. There's a service club that will do it or their neighbours and family will run them in, sometimes for the cost of the fuel.

You know, and what's better? Ride the bus, so virtually \$86. That'll fill up most tanks with fuel and you get on the bus at the coffee shop in Carnduff and you get off at the bus depot in Regina. There isn't any medical clinics at the bus depot in Regina, so now you've got to get from there down to wherever your appointment is.

But if you take the entrepreneur, if you take the service club, if you take their neighbour or their family, not only do they go to their appointment, but they could also go any place else in Regina, maybe do some shopping, visit family, whatever the case may be. They get picked up at their front door and delivered back to their front door — much better service at possibly the same price or a lot less, Mr. Speaker. So I think STC's usefulness to the province of Saskatchewan has certainly outlived itself.

[22:00]

You know, this budget is a tough budget, but it's also a fair budget, Mr. Speaker. There were no sacred areas in this budget.

We all felt the pain. Let me correct that — we all should be feeling the pain, but the members opposite won't show up at the Board of Internal Economy to take a reduction of the MLAs' salaries. There's been at least two meetings called and the members opposite refused to show up. So they're the only ones being protected, Mr. Speaker, in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of . . . You know, I look at what's happened in my constituency with the drop in the oil prices. It's had a very major impact on employment in my area. One of the companies was telling me that they had laid off a number of people, which they do in the fall quite often, but they were still losing money so they had to make some adjustments.

So they went to their employees — they still had about a hundred employees — and they said, we have two options for you. Management has already taken a 20 per cent cut, but to the employees on the floor, we're asking that you either take a 20 per cent cut, or at the end of the month we will be laying off 29 workers. You guys decide what it is you want to do. Management left and the employees talked it over amongst themselves. They didn't know who out of that hundred would be the 29 that would be let go. So they voted amongst themselves, and they agreed to take the 20 per cent cut.

And yet to listen to the opposition, themselves and the civil service should not be asked to take any pain because of the loss of revenues from our resource industries. Oil, gas, potash, uranium, are all down, and yet the opposition doesn't believe that they or government employees should suffer any of the pain. It should only be those workers in the resource industries.

Well I disagree, Mr. Speaker. I believe in this province we have benefited by those resources. We have seen over the last number of years significant investments in the province's infrastructure because of the benefits paid by those resources. And now that the price is down, we have to make some corrections to support government to provide those services like social services, like health care, like education, Mr. Speaker, but we have to do it better and we have to do it more efficiently, and unfortunately that means at less cost as well.

Now when I look at the investment in the highways that we have made over the last number of years, in my constituency under the previous administration there was virtually no work done on the highways in Cannington. There was maintenance from time to time, but there was no construction.

Since 2007, Mr. Speaker, work has been done on 13, 33 . . . Okay, I'm on the wrong list. 13 and 33 are the ones that are done, but . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, let me go through them: 18, No. 8, No. 9, 13, 33, 48, and 47 have all had work done on them. But I want to remind the member for Wood River, the Minister of Highways, that we still have a couple that need some work: 361, 318, and north of Stoughton on 47. Those are also areas with lots of oil traffic on them, and that's what causes the difficulties on those particular highways, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we still need some more work on highways, but there isn't a single individual in Cannington who would say that work hasn't been done on the highways since we formed government.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we're hearing in the last day or so about the library reductions in funding. Now you know me, I read a lot of books, and I buy a lot of books every year. My home community is larger than most libraries, Mr. Speaker, in rural Saskatchewan. But my own community is not a part of the regional library. They have their own library, you know, and we're hearing about the possibilities of the local library perhaps moving into the school or into the municipal office. Well a number of my communities such as Alida, that library doesn't have a school to move into because the members opposite closed it.

An Hon. Member: — You didn't open it up. Why didn't you open it up again?

Mr. D'Autremont: — Because it had been sold by the time we formed government.

An Hon. Member: — You could have just built it.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Well the member for Saskatoon Centre says we could have just built a new school. And in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have built 40 new schools — 40 new schools, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, which closed the schools in Storthoaks, Alida, Gainsborough, Glen Ewen, Frobisher, Kisbey, Corning, and Creelman. And that's just in my . . . I'm going to have to keep hollering louder, Mr. Speaker, to even hear myself. They have closed eight schools just in my constituency, Mr. Speaker.

We have built the schools though. And fact is, Mr. Speaker, in fact, I was on an ad hoc committee for the school division back in 1988-89, and at that time a decision was made by the school division that they needed to rebuild the Oxbow high school. They applied and got on the B-1 list, and the fact is, the school was in such terrible shape for some of those years, it was the top of the list. But the members opposite wouldn't build it — wouldn't build it, Mr. Speaker — because they, I suspect, they thought that they wouldn't likely win that riding. And it's proven true since then, so the members would not build it.

A new comprehensive high school opened in Oxbow in 2011, four years after we formed government, Mr. Speaker. They wouldn't do it . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well he says, why. The member for Saskatoon Centre says, why did it take so long? Because we had to get the money lined up. Today, we're building 18 new schools with a P3 project and they will be open this fall, Mr. Speaker. But they wouldn't allow that to happen. This year Education is getting \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker, 2 billion — that's with a "b" — billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. We are funding education, Mr. Speaker, for what needs to be done in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, shortline rails across Saskatchewan are doing well. For a long time they struggled, but they're doing well now, Mr. Speaker. And they have the option to buy the cars from the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation, Mr. Speaker. I have a very successful shortline rail service running in Cannington, Stewart Southern rail, which runs from Stoughton into Regina . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, Blair bought that line with the thought of hauling about 350 cars a year. At the peak of the oil, he was shipping 100 cars every second day, Mr. Speaker. They continue to ship not as much, but they

continue to ship a lot of cars up and down that rail, Mr. Speaker. It's a very successful business, just as a number of other shortlines around the province are very successful, including the line running from Regina up through Chamberlain and up through Davidson, that direction, Mr. Speaker.

You know, when we formed government, one of the complaints we heard prior to that was the high cost of property taxes, that everybody was paying way too much for the value. So we brought in a plan, Mr. Speaker, that lowered the property taxes down for everybody across the province. So the members opposite are commenting about it now.

You know what? There was a reassessment by SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency] this past year, and the values of most businesses, homes, and farm property significantly increased across the province, which reflects on how well this province has been doing, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we lowered the mill rates on most of those properties, Mr. Speaker, on most of those properties, so that especially agriculture is paying a lot less than they would have been under the NDP scheme which Tommy Douglas said education property tax on agriculture was too high, but he didn't do anything about it. Allan Blakeney said it was too high, but he didn't do anything about it. Roy Romanow said the education portion of property taxes was too high in agriculture. Lorne Calvert said the status quo is not on, and yet he changed nothing.

So, Mr. Speaker, it took the Saskatchewan government to lower the costs on property. Under the NDP, I believe at their peak, that property taxes was carrying 61 per cent of the load on education, Mr. Speaker. Now it's 40 per cent. So everybody has benefitted across the board. But I understand that it's a problem for the members opposite to admit that, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — I'm supposed to tell you to wrap it up.

Mr. D'Autremont: — Mr. Speaker, I'm getting heckled from my own side now because they're enjoying my speech, but the whips seem to be interfering.

So, Mr. Speaker, last Friday I had a group of ladies come into my office, not to talk about the budget, although that came up later in the conversation. So after we had dealt with their issue, I asked them about the budget. You know, these are a group of farm wives, some of them operate the farm, some of them work off the farm. And so the spokesperson kind of looked around the room to the rest of her colleagues and said this budget is what needed to be done. They had no complaints. They had concerns certainly because they were going to pay more as well, but they understood that this was the medicine that Saskatchewan needed.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget as presented, and I will not be supporting the no-plan amendment presented by the opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan].

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I do

appreciate and I want to stand on my feet in support of the Finance minister's budget. I will be voting in favour of the budget and against the amendment, of course.

You know, and I'm privileged to say that the Premier included me in his cabinet this summer and that I was able to contribute and I believe contribute well in the involvement of the preparation of this budget, Mr. Speaker.

[22:15]

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost before I do anything, I would like to put a good friend's name on the record, Mr. Speaker. His name is Richard Bloski. He's from Greenwater Lake, Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. And I went to school with Richard Bloski, and he's been an acquaintance and a friend of mine ever since, Mr. Speaker.

But yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Richard Bloski lost his life to cancer, and after a very short illness with cancer again. He just found out at Christmastime that he had cancer and he passed away yesterday, Mr. Speaker. A solid individual, worked hard all his life for the park at Greenwater Lake, and was just a very nice gentleman. And I wanted to make sure that his name, Mr. Speaker, got on the record.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I would like thank a few people. First and foremost my wife, Mr. Speaker, who . . . It's her birthday today, and she's quite a bit younger than me, but it is her birthday today, and I couldn't be in Prince Albert to celebrate it with her. But, Mr. Speaker, she has worked by my side. We've worked side by side for many, many years, for 17 years running our businesses in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. We work six days a week. She's been just a solid rock, Mr. Speaker.

She still oversees our businesses that we have remaining, Mr. Speaker, in Melfort. But, Mr. Speaker, I truly admire how strong she is. She travels back and forth more than me, Mr. Speaker, because she has to run from Prince Albert to Melfort to oversee the businesses, and she still makes time to come down here and take care of me, Mr. Speaker. So she's a wonderful lady. She is a great woman, and I'm very, very fortunate to have her as my wife.

Mr. Speaker, I have four kids as well, Mr. Speaker. They're just wonderful kids. Trent and his wife and son are good. They live in Prince Albert as well, Mr. Speaker. They live actually about three blocks from me. And he bought the Dodge dealership in Prince Albert. Him and his sister bought the Dodge dealership from us, Mr. Speaker, in Prince Albert and they run that and they do a very good job of that.

And his sister is a stay-at-home mother, but her husband as well is involved in the business, Mr. Speaker. My other son, Colby, he's a parts man with another firm in the city of Prince Albert, him and his wife and two kids, Mr. Speaker. They're very, they're very good. They live about six blocks away from us, Mr. Speaker, and so we get a lot of chance, we get a lot of time to spend with each one of them. My daughter and her husband and two kids, Mr. Speaker, they live about four blocks away from us as well. So we've been very fortunate we get to spend all this time with our grandkids, our five grandkids, Mr. Speaker.

But we have one more coming and that's from our youngest daughter who's 30 years old, and she moved from Prince Albert down to Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker, and she's due here in the middle of May. And we're very excited for another grandchild and we just can't wait for that to happen, Mr. Speaker. We're very, we're very, very excited.

So other people, Mr. Speaker, that I want to thank, is my constituency assistant, Joy Schewaga, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, she's been offered other jobs and could work for far more money. I know she's earned far more money because she used to work for me in one of my businesses, and she could go back and she could work, Mr. Speaker, in that industry and make far more money than she works for me. But she wants to work because she believes that she and I are trying to do the right thing for the people of Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. She strongly believes that we will get things done for our constituents.

And at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we can speak all we want about the big things, the big things that happen in government, Mr. Speaker, but it's the day-to-day things, the day-to-day issues of our constituents where we try to help them manoeuvre through the bureaucracy of government, that make a difference, Mr. Speaker. And she strongly believes in that and works hard to make sure that every constituent, Mr. Speaker, gets that full hearing that they deserve from us and that we push to see what we can get done for them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a small town in northeastern Saskatchewan, a town of 75 people, Mr. Speaker. That small town, there was . . . I was the youngest of five. My father was the grain buyer for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; my mother was a stay-at-home mother. I was the youngest of five. It was a small house of 750 square feet. We had nothing, Mr. Speaker. We really had nothing. We had no indoor plumbing; we had an outdoor facility that we had to use. So it wasn't a lot of fun.

I did not grow up with a silver spoon, Mr. Speaker. It was a lot of hard work. I went after school every day down to the elevator to help my father work, Mr. Speaker, because it was a very, very tough life in the elevator, working down there, Mr. Speaker. And we had this small house, like I say, with no indoor plumbing. We had to do that. My mother worked very hard, you know, with three gardens and worked very hard in helping to raise all five of us kids, Mr. Speaker.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the Finance minister, the good job that he did with the budget, Mr. Speaker. It was very, very difficult, Mr. Speaker. It was a tough, tough budget. We know that, Mr. Speaker. With over a billion dollars in shortfall in revenue from the resource sectors, Mr. Speaker, it had to be very difficult. And I'm very proud of the job that he did in getting that budget put together, Mr. Speaker. And the nice thing about that budget, Mr. Speaker: it is a plan. It's a three-year plan to get back, you know, to a surplus, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we hear from the opposition. You know, they complain about the budget, and they complain about pretty much everything that we do, Mr. Speaker. In fact I do give them one bit of credit; they did support me when we come to the impaired driving. And I do very much appreciate that, and I

hope that we can work together on a couple more initiatives in the future, Mr. Speaker.

But we do have to . . . We are waiting to hear what their plan is as opposed to what our plan has been, Mr. Speaker, of what the Finance minister's put together, Mr. Speaker. We know that we have a plan and that we have a structure that we can bring this back to a surplus situation here in the province, Mr. Speaker. And we're just kind of waiting, waiting and waiting and waiting to hear what their plan is, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we know that part of that budget was the wind-down of STC. Mr. Speaker, you know that's wind-down with a W not with a P, you know, in case the members opposite don't know. It's with a W. Mr. Speaker, that was very, very difficult. Those 224 employees, we do empathize with them. You know, they worked hard for the corporation for a number of years, most of them, Mr. Speaker, and it was very difficult.

But we can't forget, Mr. Speaker, that there was a significant decline in ridership over the last number of years, and just in the last year, Mr. Speaker. There was 35 per cent since 2012 and another 18,000 people less rides this last year than there was prior, Mr. Speaker. And that, Mr. Speaker, made it so that our subsidy had to go up to \$17 million a year, Mr. Speaker, and that is just not a sustainable figure, Mr. Speaker. We just cannot continue to operate that business, and that's why it has to be wound down, Mr. Speaker. And that is exactly what we're doing with that. It was a very difficult thing, Mr. Speaker.

One other thing, Mr. Speaker. I know that I don't have that much time, but you know one thing . . . I do want to mention a few of the things in the budget because we have done a lot of work on the highways over the past years. And I know from living in Prince Albert and working in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker, that we've spent \$5 million on the bridge here in the last few years. We've helped the city out with the bridge. We spent that money. And I know that when the opposition was actually in power back then and the bridge was in need of repairs, the answer come back . . . When the city come and said we need money to help fix the bridge, the answer come back and it was no. It was definitely no. So and then they talk about how we're not helping out the city, Mr. Speaker, but yet, you know, when they were in power they never helped out the city. The 5 million, you know, they never put 1 cent towards that bridge, Mr. Speaker, and yet they complain about how we are. And so again, Mr. Speaker, they talk out of both sides of their mouths.

Mr. Speaker, and I know the member from Prince Albert Northcote, Mr. Speaker, she keeps mentioning about how I don't support the community in Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. I don't know where she would . . . I don't have any idea where she'd come up with that, Mr. Speaker. As a solid member of that community, Mr. Speaker, I've been there for 17 years. I was on the P.A. Community Futures board. I've been on the Prince Albert police board, Mr. Speaker, the economic development board, the chamber of commerce, the Victoria Hospital Foundation, and the Rotary Club. You know, Mr. Speaker, that and my company's donated tons of money to a lot of organizations and that. And, Mr. Speaker, as the owner of that company I was the one who made the decision that we donate to various . . . All the building projects that took place,

they always come to us for support and we supported that community extremely well, Mr. Speaker.

I still support that community very strongly, Mr. Speaker. I still live there. We still support that, and we support the people and the other people that are there, Mr. Speaker. There's other companies there like . . . And I know they keep getting dished that they're not a Saskatchewan company, that they're working on the bypass, but really they're just like a foreign company, and that's Broda Group of companies, Mr. Speaker.

You know, I know the owner personally, Mr. Speaker. He's an extremely nice man. Him and his father started this business many, many years ago with one little gravel truck, and now Mr. Broda and Broda Group are national heroes really, when it comes to that. And they still choose to live and work out of Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker. It would be very easy for him to move to Calgary and run his business out of Calgary. It would be very easy to move his business into BC [British Columbia]. He has businesses in BC. He could very easily do that but he chooses to live in this province, pay his taxes in this province. He works in this province, Mr. Speaker, and he lives in our community and he contributes substantially to the community of Prince Albert.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot go to a function that he hasn't been a major sponsor of in Prince Albert. He is the first guy they go to in Prince Albert for donations, for every function that is carried on there. And yet, Mr. Speaker, we hear how, you know, he's not really from Saskatchewan or, you know, they complain about the bypass and yet, Mr. Speaker, he's probably the biggest contractor out there and they complain about that. There's 8,000 jobs out there, Mr. Speaker, and Gord Broda is one of the main contributors to that, Mr. Speaker. So I want to just . . . I want to point that out because, you know, that comes up in question period very regular, Mr. Speaker, about the bypass, and it's just not the case, Mr. Speaker.

This government has done a significant amount of business for Prince Albert, and revenue sharing has gone up, Mr. Speaker, by 126 per cent. They keep complaining that we're ditching on the cities, Mr. Speaker, but yet, you know what? It's gone up 126 per cent since they left power, Mr. Speaker. So the city actually is pretty glad that they're not in power right now, because who knows what amount of money that they would get, Mr. Speaker?

Believe me, I know . . . And I've been in that city for a long time and I know exactly that they know exactly what would happen if these guys were back in power. Probably the first thing they would do, Mr. Speaker, and I think this is part of their plan, is when they get . . . They'd probably sign on and jump on to a carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, because that seems to be the most evident thing coming out, Mr. Speaker, you know, is that they'd jump on this carbon tax would be probably the first thing they would do.

And who knows what they would do with the money, Mr. Speaker, but I know that that would devastate the economy here in Saskatchewan if they jumped on to that carbon tax, and that seems to be the only part of their plan, because they'd have no other plan other than to criticize.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, we don't seem to be able to do anything right on this side of the House, but I do know we have some pretty smart people here. Mr. Speaker, I've been in business for years, so that is why I can actually look and I can deal with the Crowns and I can talk to the Crowns. I can look at STC and I can look at that business because, Mr. Speaker, I've been in business. I analyzed financial statements for years prior to being in business, Mr. Speaker. I just didn't sit on the other side beaking and beaking, Mr. Speaker, and not knowing what they were even looking at, Mr. Speaker.

They know that when they were in power, they also looked at STC and they also know that they looked at closing STC. So all they have got to do is actually think about that for a minute and maybe remember back just a little bit, Mr. Speaker, to when they were in power.

An Hon. Member: — No, they were never part of cabinet.

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — But there was, there was . . . I think one of the members over there was part of cabinet.

An Hon. Member: — Very short period of time.

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — But they probably still were part of that discussion, Mr. Speaker. And it's very unfortunate. I do empathize with every employee at STC, Mr. Speaker. I really do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know my time is almost out, so I just want to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that I will be supporting the budget and I will be not voting for the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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