



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

of the

**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

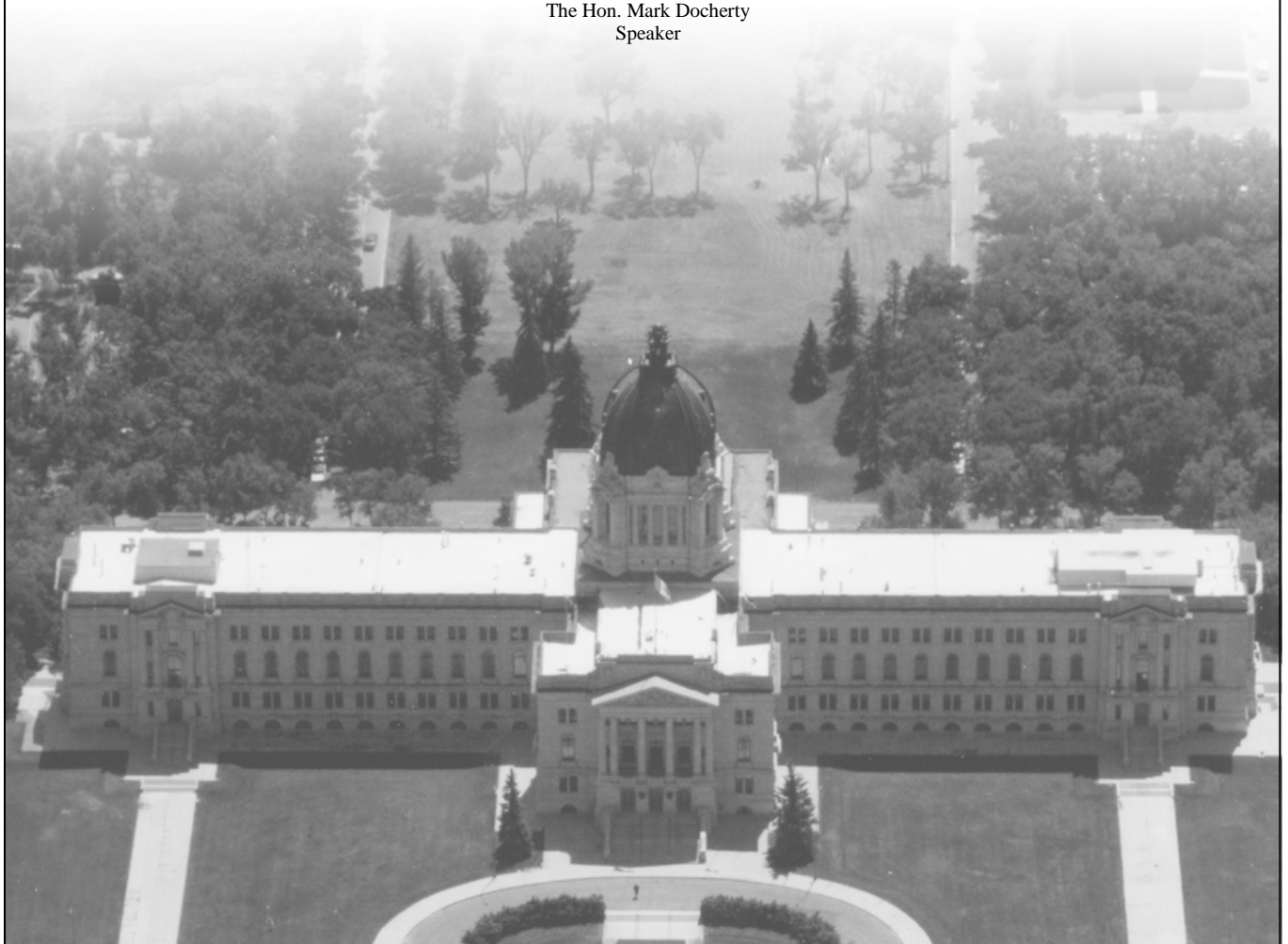
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**DEBATES  
and  
PROCEEDINGS**

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(HANSARD)

Published under the  
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The Hon. Mark Docherty  
Speaker



**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN**  
**2nd Session — 28th Legislature**

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Vacant — Regina Northeast

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**Party Standings:** Saskatchewan Party (SP) — 48; New Democratic Party (NDP) — 12; Vacant — 1

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[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

**The Speaker:** — I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Brkich:** — I request leave to proceed directly to orders of the day.

**The Speaker:** — The Government House Leader has asked for leave to proceed directly to orders of the day. Is leave granted?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried. Leave has been granted.

#### ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

#### TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to submit the estimates and supplementary estimates accompanied by a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

**The Speaker:** — Would you please rise for a message from the Lieutenant Governor. The message is as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2019, and supplementary estimates — March of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31st, 2018, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Honourable Thomas Molloy, Lieutenant Governor, province of Saskatchewan.

Please be seated. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

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

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and visitors. Mr. Speaker, today I have the great honour and the responsibility of delivering my first budget as Saskatchewan's Finance minister.

For the past few weeks this budget speech has been just about the only thing that I could think about. But then on Friday evening, that changed. Everything changed because, Mr. Speaker, I'm also the MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Humboldt, and this past Friday Humboldt suffered its darkest day.

It's the kind of unimaginable tragedy that no community should ever have to endure, and that's what I've been thinking about these past days. I've been thinking about the heroic response of the medical professionals and the first responders who saved

lives and prevented this horrible tragedy from being even worse than it already was. I've been thinking about the amazing leadership that I've seen in Humboldt and Tisdale and Nipawin. I've been thinking about all those parents, the ones whose boys were injured, the ones who received the worst news they ever could. I've been thinking about my community of Humboldt, how everyone has pulled together to help and support one another.

Mr. Speaker, Humboldt is strong, and somehow we'll figure a way to get through this. And it's going to be tough but, Mr. Speaker, I've been thinking about the overwhelming love and support that Humboldt and the team and the families have received from the people throughout Saskatchewan and across Canada and around the world. But most of all I've been thinking about the 15 lives that were cut short far too soon.

So, Mr. Speaker, even though I haven't thought much about the budget speech in the last few days, the business of the province does go on. And it's my job to deliver a budget, and so I will. But first I would like to ask this Assembly and all the guests who have joined us here today to honour the memory of those that we have lost with a moment of silence.

[The Assembly observed a moment of silence.]

**Hon. Ms. Harpauer:** — Thank you.

I am honoured to rise in this Assembly to present our government's 2018-2019 budget. I would like to acknowledge, before I begin, the attendance of my family, and of course family means more than anything now. I have with me Crystal, my oldest daughter, and Rusty, her husband, and their children, James and Lucas. I have with me Shannon and her partner, Brian Burgess, and Shannon's children, Makenna and Emryk. And of course many of you have seen from time to time my fiancé; Tom Wildeman is here with us again today.

Mr. Speaker, not all three of my daughters are here today, but it's nice to have two. And you know, I think back when I first decided to enter politics back in 1999, I was the mother of these three young children, and I had absolutely no political experience. I could not have ever imagined that I would one day have the great honour and the responsibility of standing in this Assembly and delivering the provincial budget on behalf of the government and people of Saskatchewan.

But you know what would have been even harder to imagine back in 1999? It would have been even harder to imagine at that time that 19 years later my now-adult children would still be living and working and raising families right here in Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, that's one of the main reasons I've entered politics, so that my kids and everyone else's kids would at least have the chance to stay in this great province. So it means a lot to me to say that my daughters and their families are not just visiting Saskatchewan today. This is their home. This is their Assembly. And, Mr. Speaker, this will also be the longest that they'll ever have to listen to me and they can't interrupt.

Mr. Speaker, our government has a plan and that plan is on track. One year ago our government charted a three-year course

to reduce our province's dependency on resource revenue and to balance the budget by 2019. Today's budget keeps that plan on track by controlling government spending, by making important investments in health care, education, and social services for Saskatchewan people, and by keeping our economy strong.

At the same time we have listened to Saskatchewan people. We have a new Premier who has listened to Saskatchewan people, and we have heard that some adjustments were needed to the course we charted in last year's budget. And that's why, even before today's budget, the Premier made two important announcements, increasing education funding and reinstating the PST [provincial sales tax] exemption on life, health, and agriculture insurance.

Mr. Speaker, there is another issue where our new Premier and our government have listened to the people of Saskatchewan. As you know, today we face deadlines, threats, and ultimatums from a federal government intent on imposing a carbon tax on Saskatchewan families. There are some who say we should wave the white flag and surrender to those threats, but the overwhelming majority of Saskatchewan people say no. Mr. Speaker, our Premier has listened. Our government has listened, and this budget contains no carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people have told us they want their government to maintain a strong and steady course towards a balanced budget. This budget accomplishes that, keeping Saskatchewan on track to return to a balanced budget in 2019-20 while ensuring that programs and services are sustainable now and into the future. It keeps our province on track by carefully controlling spending while balancing the need to support growth in our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has enjoyed a decade of growth that has seen our population increase by about 160,000 people. Our government always has supported that growth by making major investments in much-needed infrastructure. Once again this budget, our government is investing in schools. We're investing in roads, in highways, and we're investing in hospitals.

In this budget we're continuing to invest in the priorities of Saskatchewan people, in particular in health care, education, and social services, and we're able to make all of these investments in this budget with no increases to tax rates. That means all provincial tax rates, including those for sales tax, income tax, and education property tax, remain the same.

This budget does, however, remove the PST exemption for used light vehicles, effective April 11th. This aligns the province's tax treatment of used light vehicles with every other jurisdiction in Canada that has a sales tax. The trade-in allowance to allow a deduction for the value of a trade-in when determining PST is being reinstated, so PST will only be paid on the difference in price between the trade-in and the purchase price of the vehicle. PST will not be charged for used vehicles gifted between qualifying family members such as spouses, parents, legal guardians, children, grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings. And unique to Saskatchewan, PST will not be applied to the private sales of used vehicles with a purchase price of up to \$5,000.

Mr. Speaker, our government's fiscal plan is on track to return Saskatchewan to balance with a steadily improving outlook over the next four years. A deficit of 365 million is projected for this fiscal year. A return to balance is expected in 2019-20 with a modest projected surplus of 6 million. Higher surpluses of 108 and 212 million respectively are forecast for 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Revenue is forecast at 14.24 billion in this budget, up about 80 million from last year, largely due to higher non-renewable resource revenue, net income from government business enterprises, and other own-source revenue. Non-renewable resource revenue now accounts for just 10 per cent of the province's total revenue, which is down from a high of 32 per cent in 2008-9. One of the main goals of our three-year budget plan was to reduce Saskatchewan's reliance on resource revenue, and that plan is on track.

Our government continues to control spending. An expense is forecast at 14.61 billion in this budget, which is down from last year by 200 million.

Controlling compensation costs, the largest single budgetary expense for government, is key to keeping Saskatchewan's fiscal plan on track. Employers and unions understand the fiscal environment and continue to bargain in good faith. Through the bargaining process, fair and equitable agreements will be reached.

Beyond negotiated settlements, we've targeted the achievement of 70 million in savings over two years — 35 million in this budget and another 35 million next year. These savings will be accomplished largely through efficiency initiatives and attrition, as part of our government's commitment to return to balance in 2019-20.

An example of positive change that is achieving both savings and efficiencies while still delivering the best possible service to Saskatchewan people is the creation of a single Saskatchewan Health Authority. Consolidating the 12 regional authorities was completed last year to improve front-line patient care for Saskatchewan people.

Greater health authority integration and coordination has saved 19 million in this budget, largely through lower salary and board costs and director costs and amalgamation of IT [information technology] services. That's a 19-million-a-year reduction in administrative costs that can now be redirected to front-line workers.

[13:45]

A second example comes from the Ministry of Central Services, which reduced the number of government-owned vehicles, saving more than \$5 million. Those are just two among many examples of government improving services while controlling spending to meet the challenge of lower revenue and the needs of a growing province.

In the fiscal year just completed, expense is forecast to be down 2 per cent, and in this budget, expense is forecast to be down an additional 1.4 per cent. Controlling spending ensures our government can continue to provide Saskatchewan people with

the high-quality programs and services they expect and deserve today, and that those services are sustainable into the future.

This budget invests a record \$5.77 billion to improve health care for all Saskatchewan people, up nearly 2.5 per cent from last year. That includes 3.5 billion for Saskatchewan Health Authority operating funding, up nearly 72 million from total funding last year to the 12 regional authorities.

This budget provides funding to prepare for the opening of the Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford later this year, as well as the 2019 opening of the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital in Saskatoon.

Targeted funding in this budget will improve access to mental health, palliative care, and community-based primary health care services. We're also investing an additional 700,000 this year to ensure universal, 100 per cent coverage of the HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] drugs for Saskatchewan people, as well as providing additional HIV services.

We're also investing more than 520,000 this year in a new program to ensure that babies born here in Saskatchewan hospitals are screened for hearing loss. Another new program will fulfill our government's commitment to provide individualized funding for children with autism spectrum disorder. Initial funding of 4,000 per child under the age of six will be provided this year, for a total investment in this budget of \$2.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, the success of Saskatchewan students continues to be a priority of our government. This budget keeps Saskatchewan on track by providing a high-quality education for kindergarten to grade 12 students across Saskatchewan, and fulfills the Premier's commitment to increase funding by 30 million. As a result, Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions will receive 1.87 billion in school operating funding for the 2018-19 school year, up 1.6 per cent compared to last year. This will allow school divisions to continue to support the classroom by maintaining or hiring up to 400 teachers and other in-school professionals.

This budget also provides nearly 77 million in child care funding, including 20.8 million in new federal funding through the Canada-Saskatchewan early learning and child care agreement. This will support more than 16,000 existing licensed child care spaces in Saskatchewan and help create 2,500 more spaces by 2020.

Last year we heard from Saskatchewan people about the importance of our libraries, and in this budget libraries across Saskatchewan will continue to receive significant support through operating funding of more than \$11 million.

Mr. Speaker, a stable post-secondary education sector is crucial to our plan to keep Saskatchewan on track. This year's Advanced Education budget is up 1.5 per cent to a total of 729 million. That level of funding lets us provide stable funding to post-secondary institutions across Saskatchewan, with operating grants to our universities, colleges, and technical schools maintained at last year's level.

This budget provides more than 673 million in operating and

capital grants to post-secondary institutions, including 470 million to the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and federated and affiliated colleges; 151 million to Saskatchewan Polytechnic and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and Gabriel Dumont Institute; 30 million to Saskatchewan's regional colleges; and more than 22 million for capital repairs and maintenance throughout the post-secondary sector.

Nearly 88 million is allocated in this budget to the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] College of Medicine, helping to ensure a successful college that provides quality medical education.

Saskatchewan's post-secondary students will also benefit from 34 million in direct financial supports provided for in this budget. This budget also continues the graduate retention program, one of the most aggressive and successful youth retention programs in Canada, providing up to \$20,000 in income tax credits to post-secondary graduates who live and work in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also keeps Saskatchewan on track by helping people in need. The budget for social services and assistance will increase by 25 million to a record \$1.38 billion. This funding will help support Saskatchewan people who are most vulnerable — children in need, at-risk families, people experiencing disabilities, seniors, and people with low incomes.

More than 10 million of this year's increase in funding will be targeted to those in communities who provide direct daily care to adults with intellectual disabilities or mental health challenges and those who care for our most vulnerable children. This includes funding increases for foster families, community-based organizations that deliver day programs and residential services to people with intellectual disabilities, and other CBOs [community-based organization] that provide family-focused services.

This year's social services budget also contains additional increases that will support at-risk children and adults with intellectual disabilities, including nearly 10 million to continue moving people from Valley View Centre to new community-based homes; 9 million to provide services for children with intellectual disabilities aging into adult care, as well as for adults with intellectual disabilities whose needs have increased or who are in crisis; 4.5 million for extended family members who are caring for at-risk children and youth, keeping those young people connected to family, community, and culture; and 250,000 to operate a new group home in La Ronge for five adults with intellectual disabilities.

Given the significant increase in overall social services funding in this budget, we've decided to review all current social programs and services to ensure dollars are spent where they do the most good.

One of the things we looked at carefully was the Saskatchewan rental housing supplement. We decided to keep this benefit in place for people who are currently receiving it, as well as extend it to those who apply by June 30th of this year and are deemed eligible. As of July 1st, the intake of new applications for the supplement will be suspended. Social Services will be

co-developing a new rental support program with the federal government as part of the new national housing strategy. No one who currently receives the supplement will experience any change.

In making this decision, we noted that Saskatchewan's vacancy was about 4.5 per cent in 2005 when the supplement was introduced. In contrast, Saskatchewan now has the highest vacancy rate among Western Canadian provinces at nearly 9 per cent in 2017 according to CMHC [Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation] data.

Vacancy rates in our government-owned social housing units is also at an all-time high. With this improvement in our rental housing market, it makes sense to focus funding in other areas of social services and assistance where the needs are more pressing. Throughout 2018-19 our government, through the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, will work closely with the federal government and its provincial-territory partners to ensure that the new national housing strategy benefits Saskatchewan people who need housing.

Mr. Speaker, our government understands that many rural residents have a very legitimate concern about crime and safety and that more needs to be done. In this budget, our government continues to address the problem of rural crime by funding the protection and response team that was launched last summer. We're confident that the protection and response team will provide an effective, long-term strategy for rural reduction in crime.

Since being announced in August 2017, the team has made significant progress including the reassignment of 10 RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] positions to provide relief to detachments experiencing staff shortages. The team consists of 258 armed officers who will have arrest and detention powers, including municipal police, RCMP, Ministry of Highways vehicle enforcement officers, and Ministry of Environment conservation officers.

This budget provides 4.9 million in new funding from SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] for enhancements to the rural crime strategy. This includes funding for an additional 30 police positions for phase 2 of the provincial combined traffic safety services unit.

This budget also provides continued annual funding of 1 million from the Ministry of Corrections and Policing to address other recommendations of the caucus committee on crime.

Mr. Speaker, this budget continues our government's long-standing commitment to invest in infrastructure. Highway spending over the last three fiscal years has been nearly double the fuel tax collected into our highways budget, a far cry from the days when the fuel tax actually exceeded highway spending. This year major safety improvements are coming to many of Saskatchewan's busiest highways as part of this year's 924 million highways and infrastructure budget. With this year's budget, our government has now invested more than 3 billion into highways and infrastructure over the past three years.

A decade of growth is changing traffic demands on our province's transportation system. Our government understands

the need to make our busiest highways safer and we're also committed to getting exports to market faster and more effectively.

This coming year about 51 million will be invested in several major safety projects. We'll begin a series of twinning and passing lane projects on highways 6 and 39 between Regina and Estevan. Work will continue on the Warman and Martensville interchanges and on twinning Highway 7 between Vanscoy and Delisle. Two sets of passing lanes will be built on Highway 4 between North Battleford and Cochin. Pre-construction and design work will begin for passing lanes on Highway 7 between Rosetown and the Alberta border, and on highways 9 and 10 between Melville and Canora. And pre-construction and design work will begin for passing lanes, widening, and repaving on Highway 5 between Highway 2 and Saskatoon.

In addition, this year's budget provides for 800 kilometres of highway improvements across the province. One hundred kilometres of rural highways will be upgraded, including Highway 4 between Val Marie and Cadillac, Highway 36 between Highway 18 and Willow Bunch, and Highway 255 south and west of Tobin Lake.

Seven hundred highway kilometres will be renewed through seal coats, microsurfacing, and other types of medium paving, as well as 280 kilometres of full repaving on highways such as Highway 2 south of Chamberlain, Highway 35 south of Weyburn, and Highway 4 north of North Battleford.

This year's budget provides 330 million for continued work on phase 2 of the Regina bypass to be completed in late 2019.

Sixty-one million has been allocated for 30 bridge rehabilitation or replacement projects and numerous culvert projects.

This budget also provides 21 million in grants to support municipal transportation infrastructure, including 6.7 million to urban municipalities such as Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, and Melfort, through the urban highway connector program.

This budget also includes more than 123 million in provincial support for municipal infrastructure, including nearly 74 million for the provincial portion of the New Building Canada Fund and 12.5 million for the provincial portion of the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund.

[14:00]

Fifteen million to complete our government's 50 million commitment to Saskatoon's new north commuter parkway bridge which will open this fall, improving traffic flow and safety in Saskatchewan's largest city. And 14 million for the municipal roads for the economy program.

We're also continuing to build and upgrade schools with school infrastructure investments totalling 76.4 million in this budget, including nearly 50 million for preventative maintenance renewal and emergency funding which is up almost 15 per cent compared to last year. More than 22 million to fund two ongoing major school consolidation projects in Rosthern and Weyburn, and more than 4 million for relocatable classrooms and school facility assessments.

Also in this budget, we're continuing to fund the construction and maintenance of hospitals and other health facilities. This budget provides more than 99 million in health capital funding which is up more than 15 million compared to last year. This includes 20 million as the final instalment of our government's total 235.5 million construction commitment for the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital. An additional 6.6 million is being provided to the children's hospital for informational technology needs.

This budget also provides 34 million to complete construction of a unique 284-bed psychiatric care facility, Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford, scheduled to open this fall. The hospital replaces a facility that is more than a 100 years old and includes secure beds to provide mental health care for people in custody, a step forward in breaking the cycle of crime and victimization.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also provides stable, predictable funding for municipalities and nearly a quarter billion dollars in municipal revenue sharing, an increase of nearly 90 per cent since 2007. This amount is set through an established funding formula of one point of the PST collected in 2016-17. Due to the recent expansion of the PST base, the one-point municipal revenue-sharing formula will be revisited. As announced at the recent SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities] conventions, government officials and our government will conduct a thorough review of the current municipal revenue-sharing program in consultation with SARM and SUMA and other stakeholders.

The government remains committed to provide predictable and stable funding to municipalities. In total, this budget provides nearly 413 million of direct provincial support to municipalities including revenue sharing, infrastructure funding, and other community services. Municipal revenue sharing of 241 million in this budget remains on track at near-record highs with the following allocations: 155 million to urban municipalities, more than 68 million to rural municipalities, and 18 million to northern municipalities.

Our government continues to support programs and initiatives specifically targeted to First Nations and Métis people. The 2018-19 budget provides about 200 million for targeted program funding for First Nations and Métis organizations and individuals. Much of this funding is provided for education and career-training programs to ensure First Nations and Métis have every opportunity to succeed and be full participants in Saskatchewan's growing economy.

Mr. Speaker, our government also remains steadfast in our commitment to Saskatchewan's petroleum and mining industries, recognizing that they play a major role in keeping our economy strong. This budget will help ensure our energy and resource sectors continue to thrive and contribute to Saskatchewan's economic growth.

Major initiatives include 750,000 for a new four-year mineral development strategy to create an incentive program to encourage mineral exploration and increase the amount of available geophysical data. The new strategy will focus on base and precious metals and on diamond commodities for which

there is significant unrealized potential, to help grow and diversify Saskatchewan's mineral sector. The new strategy will encourage industry to conduct more exploration in Saskatchewan as well as project jobs in our current mining centres in the North. A key emphasis will be to encourage base metal exploration in Creighton-Denare Beach area which has a long history of base metal mining and processing.

In addition, this budget provides 1 million to continue enhancement of IRIS, the integrated resource information system, for the pipeline regulation enhancement program. IRIS is a custom-built, online business system that supports the development and regulation of Saskatchewan's oil and gas industry. This continues our government's commitment announced last year for a multi-year program to strengthen pipeline regulation in Saskatchewan. With the changes announced today, our government is on track to deliver on our commitment to significantly improve Saskatchewan's oil and gas regulatory programs.

This budget also creates opportunities for increased trade, business investment, and job creation. Our government has the highest goods exported per capita of all Canadian provinces. STEP, the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, is responsible for increasing Saskatchewan's exports to existing markets and tapping into new markets by initiating sales contracts and projects for our exporters.

This budget allocates an additional 250,000 to STEP. This funding will go to programs that support the efforts of Saskatchewan exporters to increase activities in both new and existing markets. This will create jobs and further expand Saskatchewan's access to trade markets around the world.

New business incentives in this budget include the Saskatchewan technology start-up initiative, which aims to create the conditions for continued rapid growth and success of newly emerging technology companies. This incentive bolsters our government's innovation strategy by helping to retain technology start-ups in Saskatchewan. This two-year pilot program will offer a 45 per cent non-refundable tax credit for individuals and corporate equity investments in eligible technology start-up businesses, capped at a maximum annual benefit of 140,000 per investor. To be eligible, start-ups must be early-stage, technology-based companies located in Saskatchewan with fewer than 50 employees, and at least half of those employees must be located in our province.

Another new business investment in this budget is the Saskatchewan value-added agriculture incentive, which will improve investment attraction and retention outcomes in our province's value-added agriculture sector. The incentive creates a 15 per cent non-refundable tax credit for new or existing value-added agriculture facilities that make a minimum capital investment of 10 million to expand production capacity. To be eligible a product must demonstrate that capital expenditures were made for the purpose of creating new productive capacity or for increasing existing productive capacity.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture continues to be a pillar of Saskatchewan's economy. This budget invests more than 378 million to help ensure our agriculture sector remains strong. This budget includes record investment in agriculture research

of \$32 million and more than 258 million to fully fund business risk management programs such as crop insurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest, and western livestock price insurance.

This budget also provides 3 million to support the irrigation sector, as well as increased funding for a new three-year funding agreement for Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to fostering growth and supporting Saskatchewan's business sector including small business and farmers. We are therefore encouraged that the federal government's tax changes affecting small business have been modified from their original proposals. Nevertheless the impacts that these changes could have on Saskatchewan businesses remains unknown. And we will continue to assess the changes announced in the recent federal budget.

Mr. Speaker, the 2018-19 budget keeps Saskatchewan on track by controlling spending, by delivering high-quality programs and services for Saskatchewan people, by investing in infrastructure, by keeping our economy strong, and by returning to balance in 2019-20.

Our government's vision is to ensure that Saskatchewan is the best place in Canada to live, work, to start a business, to get an education, to raise a family, and to build a life. Our 2018-19 budget keeps our government's plan and our province's finances on track by controlling spending and reducing our reliance on volatile, non-renewable resource revenue, while at the same time, Mr. Speaker, making important new investments in priority areas such as health, education, and social services.

Saskatchewan has enjoyed a decade of growth. This budget sets the stage for a new decade of growth by keeping Saskatchewan's finances and our economy on track.

Mr. Speaker, I move the motion:

That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the member for Canora-Pelly:

That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member for Saskatoon Nutana.

**Ms. Sproule:** — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, I do want to express my deepest condolences to the Minister of Finance, and through her to her community of Humboldt for last Friday's terrible, awful, and horrific tragedy.

Admittedly it's very difficult to turn our focus to the business at hand, but we must. And as we look at the magnitude of this challenge, a government that is spending almost \$15 billion of Saskatchewan people's money, our job, as opposition, is to sift through every penny, Mr. Speaker. What we were looking for in this budget, what the people of Saskatchewan were looking for was four things: a plan, hope, inspiration, and leadership. And

sadly, Mr. Speaker, this budget offers none of those.

Mr. Speaker, there's no plan in this budget. Today's budget should have marked a shift in the way this province moves forward into the next decade. This government needed to make wise investments in Saskatchewan people to get our province back on track. Now this government has titled the budget *On Track*. But, Mr. Speaker, we would like to know, on track to where exactly? It's clearly not to a place that actually serves the people of Saskatchewan or to a place that serves the future of the entire province and not just the Sask Party's re-election.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party budget is on track all right — on track to higher taxes. Saskatchewan people will now be forced to pay provincial tax on the purchase of a used car, PST on cannabis, and they are taking away tax incentives for people who buy energy-efficient appliances.

And Saskatchewan is also on track to post record levels of debt. Indeed the reality is Saskatchewan is on track to record levels of debt of \$20 billion by next year, to be exact. And there's no plan in this budget to get out of debt, only a plan to continue seeing it skyrocket. The net debt of Saskatchewan will have increased by over 110 per cent since 2007 by the end of this year.

Combine that, Mr. Speaker, with the fact that this government has mismanaged billions of dollars. They have had record revenue, revenues that are unprecedented in the history of Saskatchewan. And no other government in the history of our province has ever enjoyed the types of revenues that the Sask Party has enjoyed for the last decade, Mr. Speaker. And yet they've spent all that money, Mr. Speaker, and they've added billions to our debt.

[14:15]

Budgets are about choices, and there are a lot of choices to be made here in Saskatchewan in this budget. The people of Saskatchewan were looking to this government and this new Premier for a plan, Mr. Speaker, a plan for getting Saskatchewan out of record-breaking debt, a plan for investment and creating good jobs, a plan for growing the economy, a plan for building our collective future, Mr. Speaker. And there is no such plan.

Something else this budget is lacking is hope. In the past two years Saskatchewan families have experienced a nearly 60 per cent increase in what they pay for sales taxes. They're paying more for their utilities to light and heat their homes. Since 2012 SaskPower has increased their rates by over 30 per cent, Mr. Speaker. Bankruptcies are on the rise in Saskatchewan, and mortgage arrears are three times higher than the national average.

What people were hoping for in today's budget was something that showed them this government recognizes that the cost of living has gone up in a big way for far too many. They look to their power bills, Mr. Speaker, which are covering for the mismanagement and waste of this government. This budget doesn't go any distance to make life more affordable, and in many areas it actually makes it more expensive. Mr. Speaker, once again this government refuses to recognize the reality of



the Sask Party's cuts and mismanagement that has families paying more.

Now we had hoped . . . We had some hope this year that they might make the right decisions. Last year the Sask Party hiked the PST by nearly a billion dollars. They raised education property taxes, and their cuts to municipalities have meant that many across the province have seen huge hikes in their property taxes. And they hiked fees on everything, right down to apple juice boxes. So the people of Saskatchewan had hoped that they would see change.

Now I stood with our leader last week and spoke about some of that hope, hope for Saskatchewan's future, for our kids' future, for their education both today and tomorrow. But this budget is once again cutting money to schools. They're refusing to meet the growing needs of students and are actually cutting funding to education. Now this Education minister said today that "Education provides children with the foundation they need to pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential." Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with that minister more. But that statement then begs the question: why would a minister make and defend cuts to programs designed to help children achieve their full potential? There's literally a cut in a line item in education called "achievement," Mr. Speaker, and another one entitled "kindergarten to grade 12 initiatives." How cutting funding to those areas translates to a foundation kids need to pursue their dreams is a question the people of Saskatchewan will be wondering for some time.

There's little hope offered in this budget for post-secondary students in Saskatchewan as well. They are cutting those students' supports, slashing operational support for post-secondary students, including cuts to the Saskatchewan Student Aid Fund and of course the cut to the Saskatchewan advantage grant for education savings.

Mr. Speaker, what hope is this government offering our hometowns? Well funding is once again down across the province for cities and towns, and municipalities are being called on to further tax Saskatchewan people to make up for what the province has taken away.

And, Mr. Speaker, once again, despite the year that we've had in this province, despite the tragedies in the North and the struggles in communities across the province, despite the lingering education funding gap for First Nations children and despite an unacceptably high First Nations unemployment rate, there is nothing in this budget to help us move forward on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and this province's necessary role in reconciliation. They brag about their accomplishments here, Mr. Speaker, but there are no new training opportunities for First Nations and Métis people, just cuts.

Seniors were looking for hope today, Mr. Speaker. They are not even mentioned in the budget. And so many of them have told me they just can't make ends meet, especially for those on fixed incomes. I'll never forget one elderly lady telling me that at times for her it was a choice between food or medicine.

Mr. Speaker, the credibility of a budget can be judged against a number of basic principles, including its basis on a realistic and

balanced assessment of economic prospects, challenges, and risks. The truth is that this government has not done that assessment, and while we hoped that they would change, they have not. They're still driving us deeper into debt, putting our Crowns deeper into debt and at risk and, Mr. Speaker, they're putting our future deeper in debt. That is not hope.

We also looked for but did not find any inspiration in this budget, Mr. Speaker: inspiration for entrepreneurship; inspiration for innovation; inspiration for creativity; inspiration for bright young minds. The addition of so-called incentives in areas like value-added agriculture and for start-up businesses are all good and fine, Mr. Speaker. However there is no money in this budget for research and development, for renewable energy, and renewable resources. Zero.

Saskatchewan people, Saskatchewan people want to see this province champion renewable resources in so many ways. They want access to them. They want a hand in creating them and they want the jobs that come along with them. This government had an opportunity to inspire today's and next generations of inventors and entrepreneurs but they've missed it. The fact is the road to green technology as both an environmental safeguard and an economic driver is indeed on track all over the world except here. This government has missed that train entirely.

Now what they did include, Mr. Speaker, which perhaps speaks to this government's notion of inspiration but I would venture no one else's, are confusing, ill-conceived, and overly complex new programs, programs which will impact a very limited number of applicants. From here they appear to be another attempt by this government to do something it swore it would never do: pick winners and losers. Today, Mr. Speaker, I venture, inspiration in this budget is in very short supply indeed.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, the people of the province of Saskatchewan were looking to this government and to the Premier for leadership in this budget. What they got was not leadership. Leadership is not bragging about the highest-ever social services expenditures in Saskatchewan history, Mr. Speaker. What that tells us is that more and more people are living in poverty. Rural crime is a serious issue in this province, and issues like addictions, poverty, and mental health, which have been neglected by the Sask Party government for so long, are making the situation worse.

The Premier and his government are boasting about health spending going up, but we know it's because more people are sick and needing care. And what we don't see is more caregivers on the front lines. And for mental health specifically, this government's commitment falls short on what so many people have been calling for, for far too long.

Now they talk big, but I wish they had been more interested in their dependency on natural resources revenue when we still had the rainy day fund established by the previous NDP [New Democratic Party] government. The Growth and Financial Security Fund is now empty, and the Act has been scrapped altogether. I think we could use a bit of financial security right about now, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting that many members opposite find that humorous, Mr. Speaker, because resource revenues are now lower. That's when we should have savings in the financial security fund — security for the people of this province, security of knowing that this government has ensured that as this province grows, their services such as health care and education will keep up. And, Mr. Speaker, this shows lack of leadership.

The Sask Party has run deficits not one, not two, but three years in a row. And despite what this government boasted as a surplus in their GRF [General Revenue Fund], there were actually deficits in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Despite what they have tried to convince us, Mr. Speaker, seven of the last 10 budgets from this government have been deficit budgets, and debt, Mr. Speaker, debt is exploding.

Leadership goes hand in hand with transparency. And they need, Mr. Speaker, as math teachers often tell their students, to show their work. Instead of saying, just trust us, Mr. Speaker, this government has pushed the Saskatchewan people's trust to the limit. Mr. Speaker, when you dig just a little and see the many cuts in this Estimates book, you see how important that accountability and transparency is in a budget written by this Sask Party government.

With no plan, no hope, no inspiration, and no leadership, there's no doubt that our future's not on track. It is being parked on a rail siding.

Over the next few days, our leader and the members of the loyal opposition will continue this budget debate. We will continue to shine light on these poor decisions of this Sask Party government and on how Saskatchewan families are paying more and they're getting less and how this budget offers more of the same, offering no inspiration or leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan people deserve better. And so I will conclude my remarks for today, and I now move that this debate be adjourned.

**The Speaker:** — The member for Saskatoon Nutana has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried. I recognize the Government House Leader.

### Resumption of Budget Debate

**Hon. Mr. Brkich:** — I move:

That debate on the motion "That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government" be resumed on Wednesday, April 11th, 2018.

**The Speaker:** — It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

That debate on the motion "That the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government" be resumed on Wednesday, April 11th, 2018.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried. I recognize the Government House Leader.

**Hon. Mr. Brkich:** — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Assembly do now adjourn.

**The Speaker:** — Before I place the question on adjournment, first of all I want to thank everybody, all the guests that have joined us today, for your co-operation in observing the rules of the Assembly. This actually might be . . . You might be the best budgetary audience ever.

And now I'd like to extend an invitation to our guests to join the members for tea in the Legislative Library, to your right as you leave the Assembly, and to room 218, which is on your left.

At this time I will place the question. The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Speaker:** — Carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. Thank you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 14:27.]

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