



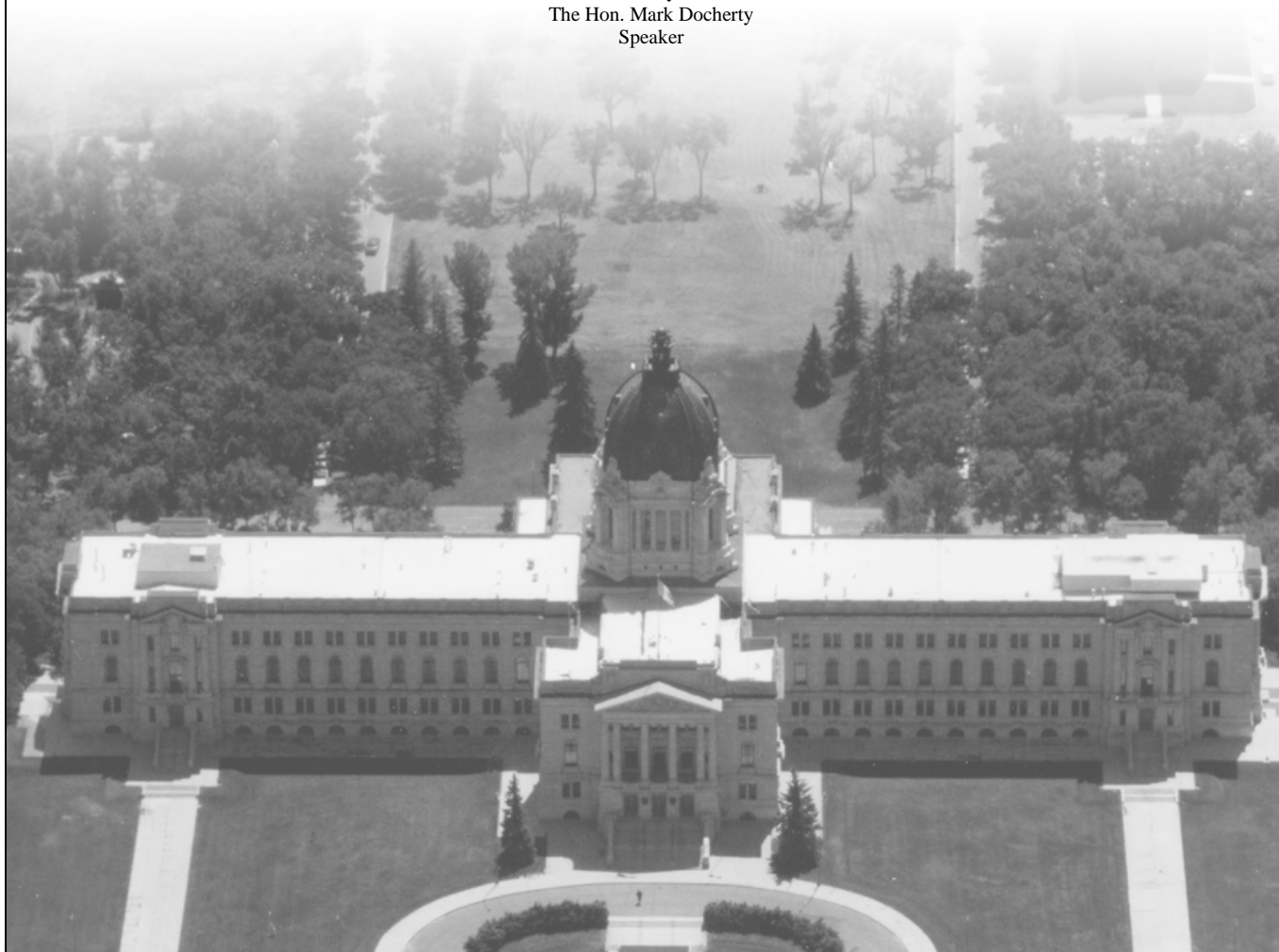
SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)
Published under the
authority of
The Hon. Mark Docherty
Speaker



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

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Vacant — Regina Northeast

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

Clerks-at-the-Table

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[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

The Speaker: — It now being 7 p.m., resume debate on budget motion and amendment.

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. Ms. Harpauer 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 Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm once again pleased to rise in my place and continue debate as it pertains to the budget. And I want to reiterate to the people of Saskatchewan a number of points that I raised previously, before we broke for supper at 5, in terms of the Tory math that's being employed by the current Saskatchewan Party government, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, they've had record revenue. They've had record tax hikes last year. And now they have a record debt.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that from our perspective it is always, always important to use every tool in the tool box to try and stimulate the economy of Saskatchewan. I spoke about the need to get all our resources to markets, and that includes oil and gas. That includes of course the farm sector, and that includes investments like the uranium industry, Mr. Speaker.

It is really, really important for people in Saskatchewan to know that on this side of the Assembly we understand the very importance of getting our product to market, especially in a landlocked province like Saskatchewan. Now what is really concerning to a lot of people in the province is, despite the rhetoric from members opposite, Mr. Speaker, they have failed miserably to achieve those objectives.

And I'll point out, as I mentioned previously, the fact that we've had a grain transportation crisis impact this province. And, Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the Assembly, especially myself as a northern member, have grown to understand, respect, and greatly appreciate the incredible investment that agriculture offers to our province, and the fact that it is one of the mainstays of our provincial economy. Those were certainly taught to me by those that lived and breathed rural Saskatchewan here on this side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. We had great agricultural leaders on our team, and over time they taught me the importance of agriculture and the incredible financial benefit it offers the province of Saskatchewan.

But, Mr. Speaker, in trying to look at what the Saskatchewan

Party has failed to do, Mr. Speaker, is they have failed to get the product to market. Now I looked at the history of the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker, and once again, as I pointed out previously, they have not been able to get the job done. They had record revenue, Mr. Speaker. Last year they completed their record taxation regime, a billion dollars out of our economy.

We have record debt today, and yet we have no pipelines, Mr. Speaker, and we are still struggling with the grain transportation challenge that the province has been suffering under their watch for the past five or six years. That is an important, important point to raise to the people of Saskatchewan.

Now I'll say this to the rural part of our province, that in our caucus we have discussions on how we could re-energize the NDP [New Democratic Party] within rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. Our task as the opposition is to not only oppose what the government is not doing, Mr. Speaker, but to also propose, and that's one of the important messages that we have when we sit down as a caucus and talk about challenges that we face as a province. And what rural Saskatchewan faces as a region, we face as a province, so it's important that we recognize that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'll point that out because obviously my more learned colleagues in the NDP caucus know a lot more about rural Saskatchewan than I ever will, but clearly we have understood that we have to reach out to rural Saskatchewan, that we have to re-engage rural Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Now I pointed out that the challenges the Sask Party have, Mr. Speaker, is that they have not been able to deliver. As I mentioned, no pipeline under Wall, no pipeline under Harper, Mr. Speaker. And certainly as I've mentioned, agricultural crisis. These are crises within the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and they have not been able to get the job done.

Now what other threats exist to our rural part of, the rural part of life, Mr. Speaker? The producers of this province; the people that raise livestock; and the backbone of our provincial economy, the word "agriculture," Mr. Speaker, what other threats exist? And we talk about those threats, Mr. Speaker, whether it's the mad cow disease challenge that I know we faced a number of years ago, or whether it's the changing environment, Mr. Speaker, or whether it's a water crisis. In some instances, in some places we don't have enough moisture. In other areas we have too much moisture, Mr. Speaker.

So we look at that particular aspect. And over time, Mr. Speaker, I have been taught by many people within the NDP caucus that rural Saskatchewan is important. We've got to re-energize and refocus and reintegrate certainly some of our values and beliefs on how we can be of assistance to rural Saskatchewan.

Things like the green economy, Mr. Speaker, those are important. Nothing in this budget about the green economy, Mr. Speaker. How about the value of carbon sinks on agricultural land when they have zero-till practices? That stores carbon in our soils, Mr. Speaker. Is that of value to rural Saskatchewan?

How about the whole aspect of a solid water-management

strategy, Mr. Speaker? We know that water is going to be a significant challenge in the future, whether there's too much of it, as we currently sometimes experience; or whether there's not enough of it, we have to experience on a pretty consistent basis. These are things that we need to address, Mr. Speaker.

Power generation. Is there an opportunity for the agricultural sector to morph part of their operations into power generation? How about habitat for animals, Mr. Speaker? And also as well, to mitigate some of the challenges around climate change.

These are opportunities over time, Mr. Speaker, that we have certainly elaborated and spoke about as we sit in caucus about rural Saskatchewan. How can we get more engagement? And this is a task that we take very seriously and are continuing to build on that front.

But, Mr. Speaker, again I go back to the point that the Saskatchewan Party have failed miserably on two key fronts: getting our oil to markets and getting the grain transportation crisis solved. They have not been able to achieve any objectives on that front, Mr. Speaker. Nothing on this budget that recognizes those challenges and yet, Mr. Speaker, they continually take rural Saskatchewan for granted.

We know we have our work cut out for us. But we continue to believe that they're a significant part of our economy and that they will be a significant solution to the challenges we face not only financially but ecologically, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, from making sure that Saskatchewan, along with the other prairie provinces continue to be the breadbasket of the world. Now, Mr. Speaker, diversifying that rural economy is so vitally important. It is so important and, Mr. Speaker, we understand that from this perspective.

Now there's two other points I want to make, Mr. Speaker, before I take my place. First of all, as you look at the pipeline issue . . . And I was glad to hear my leader today articulate his support for the pipeline. We know we have to get our oil and gas to market. We understand that, Mr. Speaker, and we continue supporting that position. We continue supporting that pipelines are essential part of our economy, and we'll continue making that message being heard loud and clear, Mr. Speaker.

The challenge we have is that we look at what the federal opposition party is doing, the Conservative Party, Mr. Speaker. They have said, on this front, too little, too late. Well I would say to the conservative party across the way and to the Conservative opposition in Ottawa, well Mr. Speaker, they weren't able to get the job done when they were in government. So now they're saying too little, too late. Well you can't have your cake and eat it, too, Mr. Speaker.

They failed to be able to deliver on that, as the Saskatchewan Party knows. So they can complain all they want off to the side, but they failed to get the job done. At the very least on this side of the Assembly, whether it's the NDP caucus in this Assembly or the Alberta Premier and, Mr. Speaker, even credit to the Prime Minister for advocating for this pipeline and pushing it through, Mr. Speaker. That pipeline can indeed become a good possibility and that will help the Saskatchewan economy. We understand that on this side of the Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It's really important for the people of Saskatchewan to know that.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'll also point out, I'll also point out about the challenges that we see as you talk about the bad investments in this budget made by the Saskatchewan Party caucus. Mr. Speaker, in the business world we do not have a problem with the word "profit." It is essentially an important part of business, small or big. Profit has always been driven by industry, Mr. Speaker, and it is not a bad word. Profit is a good word. That's what you want to see happen to all the business people and the corporations, Mr. Speaker, because they in turn create jobs and create opportunity.

But you look at the GTH, the Global Transportation Hub, the challenges we have around the Global Transportation Hub. It's when friends of the Saskatchewan Party make millions of dollars in profit on land that was overpaid for that could have been used somewhere else. That is the problem we have, Mr. Speaker. That is the problem. When we have friends of the Saskatchewan Party making millions — and I'm not exaggerating here, Mr. Speaker, they're making millions — on land deals that we're paying much, much more than what that land is worth.

So that's the fundamental problem, Mr. Speaker. This is the issue that we're raising. And that money could have been used for a wide variety of opportunity, Mr. Speaker. It could have helped the uranium industry come back in northern Saskatchewan. It could have been resources to help deal with the suicide crisis of many of the northern indigenous communities. It could help with backfilling the cuts to education and health care, Mr. Speaker, but no. No, no.

There's a significant difference between making a profit and between lining your friends' pockets. And Mr. Speaker, the Global Transportation Hub done exactly that. It backfilled pockets of the insiders and friends of the Saskatchewan Party at the expense of other projects in the province of Saskatchewan and at the expense of the provincial taxpayers, Mr. Speaker.

Now these bad land deals, Mr. Speaker, end up costing us a lot of money. No, no recognition of that in this budget. No admission by the Saskatchewan party, and I say to them, shame on them. Because we need to know exactly what transpired there and why we continue paying, I think the amount that we're talking about on the GTH land sales is \$150 million — \$150 million we spent on backfilling insiders' pockets, insiders to the Saskatchewan Party, and overpaying for land that wasn't worth that amount. And every single member of the Sask Party caucus know that, Mr. Speaker. We know that they know. And not a peep from them, Mr. Speaker. Not a peep from them.

So what happens is now we're raising taxes a billion dollars. Now we have record debt. And, Mr. Speaker, again: nothing wrong with profit, but if it comes at a great expense and an inflated expense so they can benefit the insider friends of the Sask Party, well that does a great injustice to all of us in this Assembly and especially to the Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker. And that's compliments of the Sask Party.

Now I want to close and make a few more comments, Mr. Speaker, and then I'll close on my point. When we talk about the P3s [public-private partnership], Mr. Speaker, as part of the financial package, from the opposition perspective, and I've said it many times, when you look at the P3 model, Mr.

Speaker, where you're getting the private sector to up-front the money, build the project, and of course we achieve certain objectives, we have always maintained that P3s are a valuable tool that should be used from time to time. We've maintained that position, Mr. Speaker. But there are two principles behind that, Mr. Speaker. Number one is in the case of the federal government. They offered money on a few occasions when it comes to a P3 model. And when you talk about P3s, you shouldn't leave money on the table if it furthers your agenda as a party and certainly as a province.

The problem we need to undertake, Mr. Speaker, is we have to know what are the exact costs to the people of Saskatchewan. I think the taxpayers have a right to know what the costs are. And on many occasions, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Party hid those facts from the people of Saskatchewan.

We need to know. And why is it important to know? And why is it important to have control measures in place so to ensure that the Saskatchewan people, that Saskatchewan taxpayers don't get hosed, Mr. Speaker? I look no further than the Regina bypass project — \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker, and the costs are climbing. And this is exactly my point, exactly my point of how the Sask Party have bungled that project, costing us hundreds of millions of dollars more than it should. Because they would not come clean with the P3 partnership. They would not share with the people of Saskatchewan the inside information on how the finances were arranged.

And that's my point. It is the most glaring example of how this government have mismanaged our finances, to the point where we're now looking at \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion for a semicircle around the city. And there was not a peep from any of the Sask Party MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] about the cost overruns and the inside land deals, Mr. Speaker.

And let me assure you, let me assure you that it will eventually come out. And the people of Saskatchewan and the opposition are waiting patiently for that document to come forward. Goes back to my point: P3s are a valuable tool. They should be considered by governments, but the government have an obligation to make sure those investments are sound and that we know what we're getting into. And the people of Saskatchewan, the taxpayers, have a right to know.

[19:15]

So, Mr. Speaker, we spoke about the challenges on the budget. We spoke about the issues that the Saskatchewan Party have bungled. And I know I can go on for hours if I need be. But it's important to also propose, as I've indicated, the value of some of the P3s option, the incredible opportunity for rural Saskatchewan, the engagement of the indigenous communities and the Aboriginal people so that we can all applaud the renaissance of the Aboriginal people throughout the province.

These are things that we aspire as an opposition to achieve, Mr. Speaker: "from many peoples, strength." And the Sask Party has steadfastly refused to engage the Aboriginal people, refused to engage the northern Saskatchewan part of this province.

They have ignored, on many occasions, the educators and the health care professionals that have come forward with some of

these concerns. And today, what is the result of that vision by the Saskatchewan Party, Mr. Speaker? Record debt, record tax increases — yet they had record revenue for 10 years. It just does not make any sense.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll finish on this note. It was with a great amount of interest that I looked at this advertisement. And on this side of the Assembly, on this side of the Assembly, we said we know, we know you guys have mismanaged the economy and that you have, through a variety of very bad decisions and lack of oversight, Mr. Speaker, that you've bungled our financial affairs. We have seen that time and time again.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but you look at the GTH. I spoke earlier about \$150 million spent on land deals that helped their insider friends. They built a big hole, Mr. Speaker, a big hole around GTH. And just when I thought that was enough, Mr. Speaker, I looked at a document today. Now they want to sell that hole they put us into. And I quote from this advertisement: "For sale — Regina bypass borrow pit." And it's a picture of a big hole, Mr. Speaker. It's a big hole, and it's a borrow pit. They want to sell the hole they put us in. I'm trying to figure that out. How do you sell a hole you put us in?

Well these guys figured it out. So I said, what would a hole be worth? Well they want 2.5 million bucks for that hole. We put \$2 billion in that hole. We're getting 1 per cent back . . . is that 1 per cent? I'm sorry I'm not a finance whiz. But they got this big hole. They built this big hole, threw 2 billion bucks in that hole, and they took the money out, whoever took the money out took it out. And then they said, okay now that hole — we put you in the hole — is now for sale.

So how do you sell a hole? Well they're figuring out how to do that, Mr. Speaker — two and a half million dollars. And one of the ideas they come up with is, oh it's deemed agricultural land. Well I don't know what you can grow in a hole. I wouldn't mind finding out what you can grow in a hole.

And then they said, oh it might be used for wildlife refuge. Maybe, maybe we'll build a pond and the ducks could land there. Well what are you going to charge the ducks? You know, they're not going to pay 2.5 million to land there, Mr. Speaker.

So if you want to buy a hole, if you want to buy a hole, the Regina bypass hole, there's one for sale here. There's one for sale. That's how silly the Saskatchewan Party appear, Mr. Speaker. So on trying to recover some of the costs on the GTH, Mr. Speaker, you can't sell the hole you're putting us in. It won't sell. It won't sell, Mr. Speaker. So I want to get the Page to Xerox this and share this with the entire caucus, and this is the hole for sale.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important in my closing comments to point out to the people of Saskatchewan this: in order for us to have the imagination and support of the people on our side, we have a lot of work to do as the opposition. We understand that, Mr. Speaker. We have a lot of work to do. I'll re-emphasize that, Mr. Speaker. But on our side, it's important that we acknowledge the people of Saskatchewan, right from rural Saskatchewan to northern Saskatchewan to the most vulnerable. We also have to recognize the business community, the large and corporate partners that stimulate our economy,

create jobs, and invest in our province. We understand that.

And, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of Saskatchewan are ready for change, because they have seen too much of the Saskatchewan Party and how they've bungled their way for the last 10 years of record revenue. They did not develop that decade of record revenue; they inherited it, Mr. Speaker. They inherited that record revenue. They did not develop it, but somehow they found a way to mess it up. They found a way to mess it up.

So I'll close on this comment. I am going to support the amendment presented by my colleague, the member from Saskatoon Nutana. I think her vision and her plan and her response to the budget challenges in Saskatchewan are right on. People of Saskatchewan ought to know what exactly the Sask Party is up against.

And I'll complete on this small phrase: record revenue, record tax increases, and now we have record debt. Mr. Speaker, that's the Saskatchewan Party legacy. That's the Saskatchewan Party legacy. And yes, it got them through three elections. But the words I have to all of them: was it worth it? Was it worth it? All the manipulation, was it worth it? And I say to them, it was not. Because one of these days you're going to be asked why you put three extra MLAs in. Maybe some young child will ask you or some smart grade 12 student may ask you 10 years from now, you know, why did you do that? And who is gerrymander? Just tell them gerrymander's not a person; it's a process we use to win elections.

And, Mr. Speaker, I hope it's worth it. I hope it's worth it. And I would also point out to the member from Cannington . . . The member from Cannington is speaking from his chair. He's speaking from his chair, Mr. Speaker. Does he support people investing into the pipeline, the Trans Mountain pipeline? Does he believe in investing in the railway system, Mr. Speaker, to get our grain transportation to market? Well if he does, then he's admitting all this time that the NDP were right to defend rural Saskatchewan, that the NDP were right to protect railroad rights to make sure our grain got to . . . [inaudible] . . . and that the NDP were right to invest in the oil distribution system to make sure we got our product to market.

For them to stand up today and admit that we should invest in railroads, we should invest into pipelines, Mr. Speaker, it goes back to my point. All they were good at is complaining about what the other parties were about, because they didn't have nothing on their agenda, nothing to promote hope and opportunity for this province.

And that's why we continue fighting against the Saskatchewan Party. And we pray that one of these days that the people of Saskatchewan agree with us. It's time for a new vision, new plan, new hope, and get rid of the Saskatchewan Party from the government benches in the province of Saskatchewan.

On that note, I'll support the amendment as proposed by my colleague from Saskatoon Nutana. Thanks.

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

Mr. Cox: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't know

whether I could have drawn a worse speaking order. How do you follow a great orator from the North? I don't know how it can be done. But I would show him that these are my own notes. I wrote them myself. They didn't come from the backroom, if he cares to examine my handwriting.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin I would just like to add my voice to congratulating you on being elected to that lofty Chair. I appreciate the great job that you're doing, but I would add a comment, that the hinterland has never been the same since you left. So we do miss you over in this corner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on track: what does that mean? Unlike what the opposition Finance critic may think — wrongly, I might add — that we have no plan, well, Mr. Speaker, we do. And that's how we know that we are on track, on track to have a balanced budget in 2019-2020, a plan that was formulated in our last budget.

It seems to escape the members opposite that to know your plan is working you first have to have a plan. Unlike their leader's campaign promises, unaccounted for, uncoded, but that could cost the taxpayers \$2.5 billion a year, and worst of all, no plan to pay it back — that's no plan, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I get further into addressing this budget, I must do something that we never do enough, and that is to say thank you. First of all I'd like to say thank you to our Finance minister, to all of our members of treasury board, and certainly to all the people working in Finance department for delivering this budget. You know, it's literally a year-long task to present a budget and we commend them for doing that.

Secondly, I would like to say thank you to my wife and my family for putting up with me I guess, in the first place, but for supporting me and carrying on when I am unable to be there while I'm doing the things necessary as an MLA: to my eldest son Dallin and his wife, Janelle, and their two beautiful daughters, Kaylee and Macey; to Carla and Broc, and their daughter, Quinn; and to my youngest son, Calvin, and Jess, and his two boys, Deklan and Carter. We thank them very much for all that they do and all their support that they give me.

And thank you to my two great CAs [constituency assistant], Lillian Robinson and Amanda Humenny. They do such a great job of taking care of whatever constituent concerns may come along, and I could never thank them enough.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to at this point just thank my executive on my committee back in The Battlefords: our president, Bart Wood, who is also a tireless worker during the campaign, a tireless door knocker — we appreciate all his work; Al White, who is my business manager and the treasurer of our constituency; Carolyn, who is our secretary; and Dennis, our past president, and Terri-Lynn Cann, his wife. So we thank them all for the work.

And of the greatest importance I think, Mr. Speaker, is to say thank you to the constituents of The Battlefords for the confidence they've shown in me. It has been my greatest honour to serve and to represent and to be the voice of the message between The Battlefords and here in the legislature.

And I would just say that I will continue that commitment as long as I have the privilege of occupying this chair.

But now, Mr. Speaker, a few brief comments about our on-track budget, a budget that certainly continues on the plan that was announced last year. This opposition is always confused by or has trouble understanding the investments we have made for the people and the tax saving they have enjoyed.

So firstly, just a little bit about we have accomplished in recent years. We've reduced our operating debt — our credit card debt, if you will — that we inherited from them by \$1 billion. We have invested \$12.5 billion in infrastructure since 2007. And, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in infrastructure.

Of that 12.5 billion, Mr. Speaker, 1.4 billion went to health care infrastructure: hospitals in Moose Jaw, the Sask Hospital in North Battleford — and more about that later — children's hospital, and 15 long-term care homes. Eight billion in Highways, that's an unprecedented investment for this province; 1.5 billion to build or repair schools; and billions in Crown capital. All of this in spite of dramatically reduced non-renewable resource revenue.

Mr. Speaker, in '08-09 those revenues accounted for 32 per cent of our budget. Today that number has been reduced to 10 per cent. That's a huge hole to fill on our revenue side. Just to give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker, in 2014 the West Texas Intermediate price for oil was \$107.95 a barrel, and it dropped to a low of \$26.19 a barrel in 2016. Potash was at a high of \$323 a tonne in January of 2014, and it dropped to a low of \$214 a tonne in February of '17. And today it's still only at \$222 a tonne. It's the same story, Mr. Speaker, for uranium — \$44 a pound in November of 2014, to a low of \$18 in December of '16, and the spot price this month is still at a meagre \$21 a tonne.

Even with these drops, we've continued to invest in the infrastructure, the health, and social programs for our people of this province, things like hiring 750 more doctors and 3,400 more nurses of all designations; \$8.55 million for autism services — that's an astronomical increase of 1,600 per cent since 2007; \$2.7 billion invested in mental health and addictions. And of course something that's close to my heart, Mr. Speaker, we have more than doubled the funding for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency.

[19:30]

In education, Mr. Speaker, we're investing 2.5 times more than what was invested under the opposition in 2007. This year our social service budget is 1.18 billion, which is the largest in this province's history.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time we were making these much-needed investments, we've been able to make tax reductions for some of our citizens totalling \$5.9 billion. We've taken 112,000 people right off the provincial tax rolls. Our provincial income tax is down by \$4.3 billion, education property tax down 1.3 billion. That's what we've done for our lower-income but hard-working people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I guess while on the topic of taxes, this budget

contains no increases in the tax rates. That has been one of the main comments that I've heard from my constituents over the last week. They are so grateful that we have held the line on tax rates.

That's one of the comments I've heard, but even more often I've heard, not only in the past days but over the last several months and especially during the campaign for leader and the new Premier . . . And I'd like to take this opportunity to lend my voice to congratulate our new Premier on being elected and thank him for all that he's done in the recent times that he has been our Premier.

And the comment that I heard was, make sure that whoever wins opposes the Trudeau carbon tax. This came from not only our supporters, but many I know that may not have voted for us the last time, but I am certain that they're going to vote for us this next time. Mr. Speaker, I can probably fill all of the seats in this Legislative Assembly and all of the galleries with the people that have talked to me about making sure that we oppose the carbon tax and do not let it ever come to Saskatchewan, totally unlike what the Leader of the Opposition says. And not one of those people that would be in this gallery would agree with him when he says that, and I quote, "Opposing this tax is a costly crusade, a pointless crusade." A pointless crusade to save our taxpayers a potential \$2.5 billion a year? I hardly think so, Mr. Speaker. We are not going to roll over. We're not going to wave the white flag as the members opposite would have us do.

Mr. Speaker, our made-in-Saskatchewan plan is a far better solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and that is at Boundary dam 3. We've heard in this House that we have now sequestered 2 million tonnes of CO₂. That's like taking 500,000 cars right off our roads. That's the way to reduce emissions, not a carbon tax that would cripple our Saskatchewan economy.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of attending COP21 in Paris, as did Premier Brad Wall and several officials from SaskPower Corporation, and the overwhelming support and interest in this project was very evident. In fact, in the UN Secretariat mid-conference report they highlighted Boundary dam 3 as Canada's major contribution to greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Not carbon taxes and not cap-and-trade scheming — real reductions. It's a shame that international organizations realize the value of this technology, but the opposition in our own province can't figure it out.

Prior to attending COP21, I, along with my learned colleague from Carrot River Valley, toured several coal-fired electricity plants in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, along with engineers from SaskPower Corporation who were instrumental in the start-up and operation of Boundary dam 3. Mr. Speaker, the engineers that we met at the various plants we visited were so appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about our post-combustion capture of CO₂, the first of its kind in the world. In fact, several of those engineers made arrangements to come to tour Boundary dam 3 to learn more. Again, so sad our opposition can't appreciate the value of the emissions we are capturing.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I also toured this facility with the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, Catherine McKenna, and later as well with federal ministers

Goodale and Carr. Ms. McKenna was immediately tweeting out the great work being done at Boundary dam 3 and the value of this technology. And I must also add the great value of our agriculture and our forestry sector, and the carbon sinks that is entitled there. And I understand that if we were ever to get credit for those carbon sinks, we would be considered a net emitter in this province.

The value of the technology at Boundary dam 3 is indisputable, in my opinion. Unfortunately once Minister McKenna returned to Ottawa, we heard no more from her. It's like she took a big gulp of the Trudeau Kool-Aid. Or maybe it's as Rex Murphy said in a recent speech that I heard him give — tongue in cheek, I'm sure — and I'll paraphrase here, but his comment was to the effect that as people fly west from Ottawa, their IQ [intelligence quotient] tends to increase. However, unfortunately the converse is also true. As they fly back east, it tends to decrease. Maybe he's on to something here. I'm not sure.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I can assure my constituents and all citizens of the province that I will stand with our Premier and support him in his fight to never have a carbon tax in this province.

And now, Mr. Speaker, before I wrap up here, as I know my colleagues will have more to say later, I'd just like to comment on the importance of this budget for my own constituency of The Battlefords. Revenue sharing for the city of North Battleford sits at \$2.52 million, and that's in very sharp contrast to the 1.15 million they received in '07-08. The same is true for the town of Battleford — 880,000 in this budget compared to 407,000 in '07-08. As well, the city will not see any reductions to the grants-in-lieu funding, for which they were very appreciative.

Our school boards have seen a significant increase in PMR [preventative maintenance and renewal] funding of up to 15 per cent. Mr. Speaker, we certainly welcome the \$34 million announcement that's budgeted for our Sask Hospital North Battleford, which is the largest infrastructure project in my constituency. Mr. Speaker, this is a phenomenal facility, one for which all patients and staff are anxiously awaiting.

I had an opportunity to tour the hospital recently, and it is truly state of the art. And I'd just like to send out a great big thank you to the fundraising team who I understand are at about 80 per cent of their goal to raise \$8 million for furnishings and equipment for our new hospital. Great job and thanks to all of those that are involved.

As well, Mr. Speaker, something for which the member for Cut Knife-Turtleford and I are very excited about, and that is two sets of passing lanes between North Battleford and Cochin. This is an extremely busy stretch of highway with tourist traffic and traffic from the North, as this is a major connector to the Northwest and to the North of our province. This is certainly great news in our part of the province.

One final comment, Mr. Speaker, if I may, and that is regarding the nearly \$6 million in this budget to address crime issues identified in our rural crime committee report. I was honoured to be part of that committee along with my colleagues from Cut

Knife-Turtleford, Cypress Hills, Canora-Pelly, Estevan, Regina Coronation Park, and Saskatoon Fairview. I am very pleased to see that significant funding is being allocated to this very important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just say in closing that I believe this on-track budget — that is in fact that, on track to get to balance by 2019-2020 — is exactly what our province needs, with \$14.24 billion in revenue, and that's up point six per cent from budget '17-18, and 14.61 billion in expense, and that is down 1.4 billion from budget of '17-18.

We've reduced the deficit in this budget to 365 million. It's easy to see that we are indeed on track. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the budget motion and certainly will not ever support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join in the budget debate. I think it's been a couple of years since I've been up doing the budget debate. As my job as House Leader I was busy organizing, not speaking, Mr. Speaker. But I'm very excited.

First off, I think it's . . . Everybody has done this, and I have not yet rose to my feet and spoken about the Humboldt Broncos tragedy. And my heart breaks for the families, breaks for the families who have lost, breaks for the survivors, and breaks for the whole community, Mr. Speaker. I think all of us in this Chamber witnessed an absolutely atrocious event, and it's hard to put that into words, Mr. Speaker.

We've felt our love and support from all over Saskatchewan, all over Canada, and around the world, Mr. Speaker. So I do want to say that my heart and my prayers are with all of those with the Humboldt Broncos and the community of Humboldt and the hockey community, as my son is a member of the hockey community, Mr. Speaker.

So on that, I'll just touch on this a little bit more. I have to give my thanks, my admiration to the Minister of Finance, first of all for presenting this budget, and secondly for presenting the budget in the circumstances that were presented to her. She is an amazing woman, an inspiration to all of us, to all political parties. And I want to give her my thanks for doing that and for mentoring me through my first budgetary process, Mr. Speaker, as the former minister, two-time former minister of Social Services, and also my predecessor, the Minister of Advanced Education right now, who mentored me quite a bit in the process of taking on this enormous file and this enormous responsibility to look out for our most vulnerable in our community, Mr. Speaker.

So with that, I want to . . . just a few quick thank yous to some family members. My mother and father who are down in Palm Springs, sweating out the 105 degree heat down there, Mr. Speaker, and complaining about it every day. And it is very depressing. They said they hit 38 degrees and I said, so did we, but one was talking about Celsius, one was talking about Fahrenheit, Mr. Speaker. So I wanted to say hello to my mom and my father who are down there, coming back from their six months of sunbathing down in Palm Springs.

My kids, Mr. Speaker. My daughter Courtney who . . . I just texted her recently just to turn on the legislative channel because I know everybody's turning on the legislative channel tonight, Mr. Speaker. So I just wanted to say hello to her and that I love you, honey. My son Carter who is probably having a nap right now because he's 15 and perpetually exhausted, Mr. Speaker. And my stepdaughter Cassidy who's now living in Regina, as well as my stepdaughter Keely who is contemplating her future in life with university and potentially going into nutrition, so very excited about that.

And of course my lovely wife, Leanne. I can't thank her enough for everything that she's done through a very busy time in our life while she's been fighting her own illnesses, Mr. Speaker. She's always been there to be very supportive of me and my children.

And not too often that somebody publicly thanks their ex-wife, but I would want to get that in because she's helped out tremendously. My ex-wife Cari and her husband, Dan, have helped out tremendously while I've been away and adjusting the schedule. So it's very much appreciated on that, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Don't think I've ever got that on the record, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — It is on the record. I'll send it to her as well. My CAs, Debbs and Dani, I thank you very much. I see them Friday for about a half an hour to go in and do my constituency work, sign a bunch of stuff, have a couple of meetings with some constituents, and then I'm gone. And I very much appreciate all they've done.

And my ministerial staff, that has been great. We've had a lot of changeover in my minister's office and it's been great. Dylan, Taylor, Morgan Bradshaw — who else have I got? — Anna-Maria and Maria, which makes it a little more confusing, and Mike. So all of them, thank you very much for all the prep work that they do. And my ministerial staff over at Social Services, Greg and the team over there, thank you for everything that you do.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I would be a little remiss if I didn't thank our Premier. I had the honour of getting elected with the Premier in 2011 and we instantly became very good friends. We enjoy a lot of the same things: a good joke, a good golf game — well not on his part, but you know, we certainly do enjoy a good golf game and let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, he does hit a mighty long ball. None of us know where it's going but it is going. It is absolutely going a long ways, Mr. Speaker.

So I wanted to publicly thank my friend and the Premier. And he's done an absolutely outstanding job in some very difficult times that our province has seen since his start of being the Premier. He's showed resilience and he has continued the legacy that Premier Wall . . . of instilling pride within the people of Saskatchewan. So I thank my friend for stepping up and taking this. And I want to thank all the leadership candidates. They all did a fabulous job. It was a great leadership, it was friendly leadership, challenging and exhausting for all the candidates and all those involved. So I thank everybody for putting their name forward, Mr. Speaker.

[19:45]

I guess I could start talking about a couple of things on the budget — I'm not sure on my time here — but I'll get to Social Services in a bit. But as the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Education has mentioned several times, our future is our kids. And as a father of four, nothing is more important than education. And I think in this budget as well as previous budgets, Mr. Speaker, we have demonstrated our commitment to our children . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Me? Like I haven't said anything yet.

Anyways, education is an absolute priority and our Premier, right after his first cabinet meeting, sat down and we came up with a commitment. A promise made was a promise kept of putting an extra \$30 million into our education to make sure that the school boards would be able to allocate what they needed, whether that was teachers or whether that was teachers' assistants, that we would let the school boards decide but we wanted to make sure that those positions and that money went right into the front line, Mr. Speaker. And the Minister of Education and Deputy Premier, and the Premier, that was their top priority. First thing that we did with the new cabinet that was sworn in is make that commitment solid, Mr. Speaker, and we've heard nothing but praises from the school system, from the parents, and the students. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad that we've made that investment in education, and the total education budget is now at \$2.5 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's pre-kindergarten to grade 12. That's an astonishing amount to be able to invest. Now that is operating, Mr. Speaker.

We've also had the privilege of building new schools. Why are we building new schools, Mr. Speaker? It's because our population is growing. People are continually coming to Saskatchewan from across Canada and around the world to call this place home.

And I don't know if they're coming here for the weather, Mr. Speaker, but I think they are coming here because they see this as an opportunity, an opportunity that my family and I saw back in 1988 when not a lot of people were emigrating from Toronto to Regina, Mr. Speaker. But we certainly saw the potential in Saskatchewan and have absolutely never looked back. I go back to Toronto to visit family, I go back to Toronto for meetings, but I don't miss the city of Toronto. I miss my family and I miss my friends, but because of social media it's very good to be able to keep up with them, Mr. Speaker.

But our education is extremely, extremely important for many reasons. It creates the next generation, and we want to have the opportunities here for that next generation that's going through the school system, whether it be K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] or in our advanced ed. We want them to have the opportunities right here in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, to see the potential that Saskatchewan has, the community that we have, the community on a small scale but also on a large scale. It's tough to go anywhere at any sporting event across Canada without seeing a green Rider jersey. And the community support is good.

We probably wouldn't have that many Rider jerseys if we didn't have a mass exodus for 16 long years, Mr. Speaker, where our greatest export during the 16 years of the NDP was

the people of Saskatchewan in my generation that left this province. Now a lot of them are returning, Mr. Speaker, which is great to see. They're coming back here with business opportunities. They're coming back there with their children or sometimes even their grandchildren, Mr. Speaker, but they are working on growing this province from the inside, Mr. Speaker.

I want to touch on a couple of other things, Mr. Speaker, and certainly what is first and foremost to everybody in Saskatchewan these days is our economy. And the reason that we want to grow our economy, Mr. Speaker, is so we can provide for education, for highways, for health, for social services, for advanced education. The only way that we can do this without debt financing, Mr. Speaker, is to grow our economy.

Now other provinces and our federal government have decided that debt financing is something that they're very interested in. They have no plan to pay down our debt. We have a plan and we are on track. It's very exciting to be in Saskatchewan right now. And we had some difficult financial times, Mr. Speaker. It's been well documented in this Chamber and outside this Chamber as to the resource revenue shortfall that we experienced here in Saskatchewan. Nobody predicted this, Mr. Speaker, but we had a plan to be able to deal with it while continuing investing, while not shocking the economy, Mr. Speaker. We wanted to keep things on track in Saskatchewan because we know that that's the best for our generation and certainly for the next generation, to make sure that we have a plan.

And I think this has been recognized by the credit agencies, the banks across Canada. And we are trying to fight a little bit of an uphill battle on our economy, Mr. Speaker. Our federal government is not very supportive of what we are doing. There are investments that are going outside our province and outside of our country because of a looming carbon tax, Mr. Speaker, which would absolutely kill this economy.

It bothers me right down to my core that the opposition thinks that we should take a \$62 million handout from the federal government to impose a \$4 billion tax on the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. It just doesn't add up. And as long as I'm an elected official and as long as we have the privilege and honour of serving in government, we will make sure that there is no carbon tax for the people of Saskatchewan and make sure that we represent Saskatchewan on a provincial level but also on the federal level, that they know that this is a job-killing tax, Mr. Speaker.

In touching about health, Mr. Speaker, some of the things that certainly, as a father of a child with different abilities, it's great to see that we have an investment of individualized funding for autism and autism spectrum disorder. Mr. Speaker, this is critically important. What this is, for people that aren't familiar with this, Mr. Speaker, is it's allowing the parents to ultimately decide what is the best course of action for their child with autism spectrum disorder. Mr. Speaker, this allocates \$4,000 for each child with autism spectrum disorder that they can look at whether they want to look at ABA, which is applied behaviour analysis, whether they want to have the different types of speech therapy, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that the parents have the choice to be able to do that. And we want to

make sure that we have the services available for them to be able to work with the school system, Mr. Speaker, as well as the health care system to make sure that they have some input in what is going to be best for their child, Mr. Speaker.

And one of the other things that I know the newly minted Leader of the Opposition asked for, which we're already working on — and obviously they claim credit for this — was universal coverage for HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] medications.

And again, Mr. Speaker, we've seen that if we can get in and we can treat HIV and AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] at a very early point, the impact on the individual, which is most important, can be minimized and with medication they can be able to function at a very high level. But, Mr. Speaker, if we don't have that, then we have some medical costs, short term and long term, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some of the other things that I want to touch on, Mr. Speaker, is . . . Obviously I'll get into my ministry a little bit, with Social Services, but the biggest thing in Social Services that I am most proud of, Mr. Speaker, is that we were able to allocate \$10.4 million for those that are helping the most vulnerable in our community. These are front-line people, Mr. Speaker, that are working with adults with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities. These are the people that are on the front line and they have a very challenging job, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Their job is to take care of the most vulnerable, and they do a fabulous job.

And through some great support by my caucus colleagues and my cabinet colleagues, certainly my predecessor, and the Minister of Finance, we were able to allocate this money and we had unanimous support. Nobody that I talked to said that this was the wrong decision, to make sure that the most vulnerable were taken care of and that the people that were taking care of the most vulnerable were taken care of too, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And it wasn't too long ago we were at a SARC [Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres] event in the Legislative Building where I got called out on the carpet by a lady with a disability. And she came right up to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and said, "You better take care of the three people that are looking after me," and called me out in front of my colleagues, in front of the opposition, and in front of the disability community.

So I'm happy to be able to say that we've fulfilled that promise. I couldn't tell her at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, due to the budget confidentiality, but I did write her a little note saying, I'll do my best to take care of the people that take care of you. And it was a great moment. And then after that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she came back at me one more time, and she made me make sure that I promised her and I promised her care workers that I would take care of them. And I think we've taken a huge step in that direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A couple of the other things that I wanted to touch on, Mr. Speaker, was foster families. This is something that again is a very challenging job. When a child is going into a foster family, they have some challenging situations that they need to deal

with. They might have multiple foster children. They might have their own children, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But we need to make sure that we take care of them as well and we make it viable for them to be doing this. They are doing a ton of work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I wanted, as well with my caucus colleagues and my cabinet colleagues and the support of treasury board — I forgot the support of treasury board — to be able to make sure we take care of them.

We have some challenging times in our child and family services, Mr. Speaker, and the social workers that do the job, they're not looking at trying to take families apart. They're trying to keep them together, Mr. Speaker. And sometimes that is a very winding path. And we want to make sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when they're on that path that we keep reunification as much as possible. We want to keep contact with the parents. We've seen some exciting information about the contact with the parents as long as they have . . . And the reunification of the family, that's what we want. First and foremost we have to have the child's best interest and their safety. But if at all possible, we want to have the child connected with their family in one way, whether that's in-house support, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or whether it's a connection with the family at one point or another.

The other side of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is we want to make sure that they're in touch with their culture, that if there is a cultural component or a religious component, that we have some contact with that because that's important. It's not just always about the person. It's about their culture. And I've heard some heartbreaking stories when I was in Ottawa about children that felt that they had lost their culture. So I'm very proud to say that with the help of the FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations], with Vice-chief Pratt as well as with the tribal council in Saskatoon and other tribal councils, that we're able to try to work with them to be able to have an elder come in and talk to some of the youth. If they want that, we would try to make that available with the tribal councils and with FSIN to be able to make sure that the children are taken care of. And that's what we want. And I've said it many times, Mr. Speaker: I want what's best for that kid, period. That's all I'm looking at, Mr. Speaker, and I think that's all we're all looking at on both sides of the aisle, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As far as other things within Social Services, we've been able to continue our commitment to the Valley View transition, another \$9.9 million in Valley View. And I had the opportunity to tour Valley View just after I was appointed Minister of Social Services, and toured the facility and met certainly some of the staff but as well as some of the clients of Valley View. And some of them have been there for years.

And I'm very proud of the Valley View transition committee as well as all of my predecessors in Social Services. We were able to do this the right way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We were able to make sure that their Valley View families, which they had been living with together for many years, sometimes decades, that they were able to keep contact with their family, and we tried to move each unit as a whole into a house.

We worked with the families, we worked with the clients, and we worked with the staff to make sure that the Valley View

transition . . . And it has taken a few years, but I'm very proud to say that we have done it in the best possible way we could with a dated, aging facility. We've purchased and renovated homes all over Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to try to keep those families together. And I even saw a nice picture of four former residents of Valley View that were sitting on the deck in their home, enjoying a nice cold beverage during the summer. And it was very encouraging to be able to see that they were experiencing life and they had their family around them, not just their genetic family but their Valley View family. And we were able to keep that intact.

So I have to thank my predecessors for doing this. I'm sure it was very difficult, but it was the right thing to do. And I'm very proud when our government does the right thing. It may cost a little bit of time and a few dollars, Mr. Speaker, but in the long haul it's the right thing to do. And I'm very proud that we are continuing doing the right thing.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker, some of the other things within social services that we've touched on was . . . And I've heard comments from the other side about forgetting about the North. And we haven't done that in any level of our government, in any ministry, but certainly we're very, very proud that we have \$250,000 to operate a new group home in La Ronge for five adults with different abilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we are investing in the North. We are investing in all sides of the province, Mr. Speaker, and we're taking care.

And I can't do this as Minister of Social Services by myself. I've got great support. I've got great mentors. I've got a very supportive Premier who is very understanding of what my needs . . . or what I see are the needs of the community, falling on my background as well as leaning on my colleagues, and understanding what the needs are in different communities because I don't have a good feel for, sometimes, what's happening in rural Saskatchewan. So I do touch base with my rural colleagues to be able to find out what's going on there so I get a better understanding. And I value their opinion, and I encourage them to keep challenging me on what is going to be best for rural Saskatchewan within my ministry or the ministry that I have the honour of representing.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on for a very long time about a lot of things, but I know my colleagues want to be able to get up and speak about the budget, and I do recognize that. And I very much appreciate that, I'm not sure if everybody's not heckling me or if they've just kind of had a little power nap, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it's been very nice and quiet in the Chamber, quieter than I can ever remember it being in here when I've been speaking.

But I certainly, I certainly can't support the amendment put forward by the member from Nutana. But I certainly do support the motion put forward by the Minister of Finance, and I'm very proud to support this budget. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Crown Investments.

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully it remains that quiet while I'm speaking, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Not now.

Hon. Mr. Hargrave: — But it might not. It is my privilege to rise in the House today to speak in support of last week's budget put forth by the Minister of Finance, my good friend and the hon. member from Humboldt. This budget shows that we are on track to be back to balance in 1920, maintain a AAA credit rating, and continues to lessen our reliance on resource revenues, Mr. Speaker. I'll come back to more things exactly on the budget, Mr. Speaker, later on but I just wanted to highlight that fact.

I have been fortunate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have been elected by the good people of Prince Albert and represent them over the past two years, Mr. Speaker. And all the citizens I represent, well I represent Prince Albert Carlton, Mr. Speaker. Prince Albert is a small community, and we always feel like we represent the entire city and the entire area around Prince Albert, Mr. Speaker.

Prince Albert is of course a great city to live in. It's a great city to do business in. And the plus is, Mr. Speaker, that it's right near the lakes. Everybody loves to come through Prince Albert up to the lakes, Mr. Speaker. We're not far away when it's that time to relax. You're out there and you can go snowmobiling, you can go boating in the summertime. You can go out to the lake and it's wonderful. It's a wonderful place to be, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, you don't snowmobile in the summer, but you know, that's okay. Some people do.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank a few people first. First and foremost is my amazing wife, Fran. She is just an incredible lady, Mr. Speaker. And for all the years we had businesses, Mr. Speaker, we worked side by side. Our offices were next to each other. And well, some people say you can't work with your wife or husband, that they could never do that. We enjoyed it thoroughly for many, many years, Mr. Speaker.

And you know, if there's any difficult part with being down here and working down here, Mr. Speaker, and being in the House is the fact that she's in Prince Albert and I'm here, and we're just not quite used to that. And in Prince Albert people would wonder if I went to someplace by myself, they'd say, well where is Fran? They just couldn't believe that we wouldn't be together at an event. So it's very rare. That's the most difficult part about being in politics and working out of Regina.

I have four children: two boys and two girls. And I'm a proud grandfather of six: three boys and three girls. As you can see, we believe in equality, Mr. Speaker, that they're there and we taught our kids well. We taught our kids, you know, this is how we do this. This is how we do things. My oldest son, his name's Trent and his wife is Lisa. And they have a nine-year-old son, his name is Elias. And he's in Prince Albert, and he and another one of our kids own Riverside Dodge and are doing wonderful work there and doing a great job.

I have a daughter, Angela, and she's the second oldest. And her husband's name is a real good name; his name is Joe. And actually when they got married I strongly suggested, because the name was well used before, that they should name him after . . . that he should take her last name. But they disagreed and they decided to actually take the name of Weinrich. Just an average Joe. Just an average Joe. Anyway, Angela's husband's Joe, and they have two kids. They have Noah and Layla.

And then our third oldest is Colby. Colby and his wife, Becky, they also live in Prince Albert. We're fortunate that Trent and Angela and Colby all live in Prince Albert. And they all live within blocks of us actually, so we get to go visit with our grandkids lots or our grandkids get to come with us. And we actually get to take them to McDonald's regularly, or wherever they want to go. Sometimes they get a little more expensive taste, they want to go out to Montana's. But we're always happy to take them out . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And yes, we want to go Canadian beef. You notice I never said A&W. But anyway, Colby and his wife, Becky, they have two kids. They have Hannah and Myles.

And then there's our youngest daughter, and she's 31. But her name is Jillian and her partner's name is Greg. And they live in Warman, and their daughter's name . . . And she's our youngest. She's sort of our latest little grandchild, and she's quite a bit younger than the other one. She's only 11 months old. But she steals grandpa's heart every time I see her. I don't see her even that often, but yet she recognizes me. She knows me, and she wants to sit up on and snuggle into me. And yes, they just know how to steal your heart. I should have had them first, as I've often said. They're just wonderful.

And also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank a few other people. My CA, Joy Schewaga, was down here the other day. I introduced her in the House the other day. She's just a tremendous asset. She works hard. People like her; they feel free to talk with her about things. She's done a tremendous job for me, Mr. Speaker, and I'm so happy that I could have her. Joy worked for me a number of years ago in business, and when the opportunity come for me to hire a CA and she was available, there was no question as to who I wanted to get.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my staff here at the legislature. And my chief of staff is Angela Currie. She should be watching this right now, but I'll just look at that . . . but I think she might not be. She might be crying a little bit because I understand that her Boston Bruins have just lost to the Toronto Maple Leafs. And I don't know, I feel for her. I hope she's not sick tomorrow. I hope she comes to work and she's not sick, but it's pretty sad.

I have two MAs [ministerial assistant]. Caitlin Lane-Graham is one; she's my more senior MA. And Linda Holzer is my more junior MA. They both do a tremendous job for me, and it's great to have. And my senior admin is Shelley Duke. And you know it's great to have all these ladies in my office. They're great workers. They do their job tremendously. As well they kind of spoil me a little bit, and I don't mind that. So I'm quite used to that and I'm grateful. My wife tells them not to, but they still do. They're all a great group and we really appreciate it.

As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank our Premier for

the confidence that he's shown in me to bring me back into cabinet or to keep me in cabinet, Mr. Speaker, in a portfolio with SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] that I appreciate. I love business, and the Crowns and CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] are business. And I love business, and I love to do that. I love to do that job, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, family is so very important, especially in light of the tragic, tragic events last week involving the Humboldt Broncos. I want to give my personal condolences to all the families of the victims of the crash. As well, I want to give my personal thanks to all the emergency personnel, the first responders, and those who just stopped to help on scene and at the hospitals. As well, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank those who have and are working so hard to comfort the families and those affected, Mr. Speaker, and pay tribute to all of those affected.

Never has such tragedy, frankly, brought a community, a province, a country, and a world so close together during such an awful, awful time. Wherever you go around this province, you see the signs of support for the community and surrounding areas, making one feel so proud to be part of the best province in Canada.

It has made Saskatchewan that, while Saskatchewan is big, it's made us all one small little town. And it gives you that small town feeling again, that small community feeling, where we talk with strangers at the store. We show more humanity. We are actually taking the time to sit face to face and talk instead of just sending a text or other social media. It has brought families and friends so much closer.

I do hope that this continues on, that it's not just for a few weeks, but that it continues on month after month after month, you know, that bringing that closeness of people together. The community will need us now and going into the future, but this past week we've all seen amazing things from all over the world — from the money raised, sticks on the porch, jersey day, and small community fundraisers.

One of the things that has touched me most was the selfless act of Logan Boulet. Logan signed his organ donor card when he turned 21, just a few weeks before the tragedy. This selfless act has saved six people directly. But even more amazing is the fact that in Alberta, more than 10 times the usual amount of people have signed up to become organ donors, and in Saskatchewan the same thing is happening, as well as the numbers have spiked all across Canada.

Along with that, there have been a record amount of people giving blood. Logan is an inspiration, and his initial act of kindness to donate his organs to six people has now turned into a movement that in the long run may help many waiting for organ donation and blood services.

Humboldt is strong and has made Saskatchewan people even stronger. We will continue to rally around them now and into the future.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a little bit about the important work that's done by the people, the good people at SGI. Impaired driving is a very serious issue in Saskatchewan

and is something very near and dear to me. I am so very grateful to the Premier for allowing me to work with SGI and help curb the number of deaths and injuries in Saskatchewan from impaired driving.

We have made substantial changes to impaired driving laws, and I thank the member from Regina Lakeview for her support that she has given in making sure the changes we have made are unanimous. And I appreciate that both sides of the House worked together to make sure and realize that this is a problem that we need to combat and work together on. But we're not done yet, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work on this file. We'll continue to do the job until those numbers are down, down, down.

We did a recent announcement, Mr. Speaker, on deaths on Saskatchewan highways in 2017. That number was the lowest number achieved in over 60 years, Mr. Speaker. Now 102 people, Mr. Speaker, 102 deaths is still 102 deaths too many. But it's down from 125 deaths in 2016. And it's down from 148, which is the 10-year average, Mr. Speaker. So that shows signs of good improvement, that people are actually starting to maybe pay attention, take notice. We hope it's not just a blip, Mr. Speaker. We hope that it continues on for this year and for next year, Mr. Speaker.

In the next few weeks, Mr. Speaker, I'll be announcing positive results on impaired driving as well, showing that the changes we have made to drinking and driving, and driving while impaired, are making a difference. So stay tuned for that one, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we must always remember those and their families who have been killed or injured by impaired drivers. We must always remember those first responders who have been on the scene and had to deal with this tragedy, because all of their lives are changed forever, Mr. Speaker, all of their lives.

[20:15]

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of speaking at a school recently, along with representatives from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and my hon. colleague from Gardiner Park. We were speaking to kids that were in grade 7 and grade 8, and showing them how impaired driving can be so harmful and change lives so, so badly.

It's these young people that will make the difference, Mr. Speaker. It is a generational thing. I remember when I was their age, and I related this story to them when I was speaking to them. No one wore seat belts when I was young, no one. Most cars didn't even have them in, Mr. Speaker, most cars . . . I mean it was nothing. The dashboards were metal. I mean, I remember standing beside and having my arm around my dad as he was driving, Mr. Speaker. It was just not a big deal. Nobody.

But, Mr. Speaker, deaths were high then. If you touched the brakes you were in trouble. It was just commonplace that you hop in the car and drove away. Today, Mr. Speaker, my grandchildren would holler and scream if I tried to drive away and they didn't have their seat belts on.

I asked those kids, I asked the kids the other day, I said, “Can anyone here put up their hand if you’ve ever ridden in a car without your seat belt on?” I looked around. Not one of them raised their hands, Mr. Speaker. And that is what I hope this next generation will be like when it comes to impaired driving. One where they will not even think about getting in the vehicle if they or the driver has been drinking or taking drugs.

I must tell another story, being as I’m on a story routine. Mr. Speaker, I was taught by my father, and I’ve taught my kids, that if you want to make a difference, you have to get involved. And, Mr. Speaker, that is what I have done, and that’s what my kids are doing as well.

A few years ago, Mr. Speaker, a gentleman came into one of my dealerships to buy a new vehicle. I recognized him immediately as my old high school principal, and at that time I thought he was pretty mean because I kept getting sent there. But he was dealing with one of my staff on purchasing a new vehicle, so I just watched. I didn’t say anything. But before he left, I went up to him and I introduced myself and I said, I told him who I was and that I went to Porcupine Plain High School, and did he remember me? And he looked at me, and he looked at me kind of funny, and he said, nope, I don’t. And I said, well I should say that was really no surprise to me because I was not on the valedictorian track. You know, I was like, I said I was in his office on a regular basis, and I wasn’t picked as the most likely to succeed in my class. Surprise, surprise.

But then he said, then he said, but I remember Elaine Hargrave. Would she be your sister? And I said yes, she would be. And he said, I remember Ralph Hargrave. Would he be your brother? And again I said yes, he would. Of course they were the two goody two-shoes of the family, and that’s why he remembered them. She was like valedictorian and he was just mister friendly RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] guy and all that. But nope, he says, but nope, I don’t remember you.

Well he bought a vehicle from us anyway. Thank God he didn’t remember that I was one of the kids that sat in his office regularly as being in trouble. And on his many trips to the dealership in order to get his vehicle serviced and oil changes and things like that, he would actually come to my office and we’d sit and talk. And a few times we would sit out at our cabin at the lake, on the beach or, you know, near the beach area on a bench and we would chat on the bench. And it was quite a big deal.

So shortly after my election in April of 2016, you know, to my surprise, to my major surprise, I received a card in the mail. And the card read:

Congratulations to you on your win to the provincial legislature on April 4th, 2016. Obviously you had many voters cheering for you, for they recognize your leadership qualities. It will be a great experience for you and your family.

Also, thank you from us for allowing your name to stand for election to your provincial legislature. Saskatchewan needs good people who are good leaders to represent them in Prince Albert Carlton, as well as the rest of the province. We are sure that you and your efforts will make us all

proud.

It was signed by Larry Lozinski. And Mr. Lozinski was a tremendous person. I mean, in our discussions, after I got the nom again when I was a little older, it was more than evident.

I mean, you know that principal, that mean old principal when you’re growing up — that you’re thinking that they are — it turns out, you know, they’re just regular people just like you and I. That’s exactly what it was, and it was such an honour and a source of pride for me to get this letter from him after so many years and I was very, very pleased.

Now I’ve got to return, Mr. Speaker, to my thoughts on the budget. And Saskatchewan is projected to have the fourth-highest growth in the country in 2018 and the third-highest in 2019, according to the private sector forecast. Competitive taxes and targeted incentives support continued diversification and growth in Saskatchewan’s economy.

You know, I’ve listened to some of the members opposite on their comments on the budget, Mr. Speaker, and I’m pretty sure that they weren’t listening when they went to the budget briefings. And I’m darned sure they never listened to the Finance minister when she actually made the speech here in the House. But you know what, I actually was, so I’ll just give them a few more highlights just so . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I’m glad they’re awake over there. I was getting worried that everybody was dozing off. I thought I heard snoring a couple of times but . . . I thought I heard snoring but apparently not. It’s good.

So a couple of the highlights: 413 million in direct support to municipalities and 123 million for municipal infrastructure; increased funding to STEP [Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership], the Saskatchewan trade and export program, to expand the province’s export markets; 2.7 million investment in infrastructure including Crown corporations to support the growing province; growth tax incentive to encourage investment, diversify the economy, and create jobs.

Spending is forecast to be 1.4 per cent lower than last year’s budget. We saved 5 million by reducing the number of government-owned vehicles. 19 million in savings from amalgamation to one health region while improving frontline care.

No tax increases. No tax increases. No carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. No carbon tax. And that’s so huge considering what members opposite are projecting, that job-killing \$4 billion carbon tax they just have no problem signing onto because it would bring us, cost us 4 billion to get 65 million, but they have no problem. No tax rate increases. Low personal and corporate income tax remain the same. No increases to the education property tax or provincial sales tax rates.

Record investment in health care includes universal HIV drug coverage, new psychiatric facility, the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford that will be opening in the fall, and the Children’s Hospital in Saskatoon. New hearing loss screening program for babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals. 2.8 million for new autism individualized funding benefit.

Thirty million increase in education operation funding that goes to the front line, Mr. Speaker, for the 2018-19 school year. Funding increases for foster families, caregivers, and community-based organizations supporting children in need of protection, at-risk families, and adults with intellectual disabilities.

To keep the provincial government's three-year plan on a balanced budget on track, we are investing in infrastructure to support safety and growth: twinning and passing lane projects on highways 6, 39, 4, and 7; phase 2 of the Regina bypass; completion of funding for Saskatoon north commuter bridge; 4.9 million new funding to help keep rural residents safe through a rural crime strategy; keeping our economy strong.

New tax incentives: Saskatchewan value-added agriculture and technology start-up to support investment, job creation, and productivity; incentive programs to encourage mineral exploration, grow and diversify our mineral sector. All returning to balance in '19 and '20.

Our three-year balanced budget remains on track. Balance ensures long-term sustainability and continued investment in infrastructure, improved revenue stability, and less dependence on resource revenue.

The third-lowest debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] in Canada. I know we have some debt, Mr. Speaker, and we need that debt. We had to do the infrastructure. We were left with a massive infrastructure deficit and we had to, we had to build it. And with a growing province we have to invest in more infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. And that's how that goes. But we still have the third-lowest debt-to-GDP in Canada and a strong AAA credit rating.

Budget 2018-19 keeps Saskatchewan on track by controlling spending while delivering high-quality services for Saskatchewan people. This budget invests in people while keeping on track to bring this budget back to balance.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to support the budget put forward by the Minister of Finance. And I will not, I repeat, I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Ms. Beaudry-Mellor: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my one fan in the back row there. You know, I want to start by saying thank you to Mark McLoughlin, my deputy minister; Tessa Ritter, my chief of staff; and Wendy Ward, my CA. I think together we make a pretty good team. And I know they're watching with bated breath in front of their TVs tonight, partly because they have no life, being on my team.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are 49 of us on this side of the Assembly. And in my short time of having the privilege of serving in these august halls, we've really been through a lot. Since I was elected in April of 2016, we have buried two of our members unexpectedly. We said goodbye and hello to four members, which also of course means we've been through four

by-elections, soon to be five. Two members have been battling cancer. One member has had a son who was critically injured. We've gone through a vigorous five-month leadership campaign with six candidates — two women, one Aboriginal person, and three men. Of course we've said goodbye to Brad Wall, whose brand will forever be imprinted on this party. We've embraced the leadership of Premier Scott Moe, who is already making his mark. And we've been faced with a horrible tragedy as a result of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a mom who literally rushes out the door from here to get supper on the table and kids to sports, often coming back late at night to work, and sometimes catching one of my kids' games in between things, the tragedy over the Broncos is really close to home. There are few things I love watching more than watching my kids compete. I'm very mindful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I still have the privilege of doing these things while other families do not. And my heart goes out to them. A 16-year-old should never be a pallbearer for another 16-year-old friend, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The trajectory there is just so, so wrong.

All of this would have fractured even the strongest party, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I've come to know that I'm truly surrounded by some incredible people. Members of the public unfortunately only get a very small glimpse of the depth of character and talent that we have on these benches and I really want them to know about it.

I'm constantly inspired by the member from Martensville, the member from Meadow Lake, and the member from Indian Head — all of whom are astute political minds.

I'm always in awe of the steadfast commitment and pride in their constituency that the member from The Battlefords, the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford, the member from Melville-Saltcoats, and the member from Regina Pasqua have.

The member from Saskatchewan Rivers, the member from Saskatoon Westview, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, and the member from Yorkton hold our heartbeat, Mr. Deputy Speaker, along with the Speaker.

The member from Saskatoon Stonebridge is one of the most eloquent speakers in our benches although may have some competition from the new member from Swift Current. And our Finance minister by far is the most fearless. I admire the historical memory of the member from Cannington and the steadiness in everything they do from the members from Rosetown, Saskatoon northeast, and Lumsden-Morse.

[20:30]

The member from Saskatoon Willowgrove is an incredible organizer, while the member from Prince Albert Carlton is a gentleman in the most true sense of the word. The member from Weyburn-Big Muddy is one of our sharpest minds, while the member from Moosomin is our global citizen. The members from Estevan and Lloydminster nurture us.

I want to point these things out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I count myself as privileged to be a part of a great team. I have the fortune in this life of never having done a job I hated. I've

always really enjoyed my work, and this place is no exception, but it is, I think, extraordinary. Not only have I aspired to adopt many of the incredible gifts my colleagues in this place have, but I've also never laughed so much.

There is a sign in my office upstairs that says, "If you're not having fun, you're on the wrong team." Politics is very rewarding but can also be very tough sometimes, and given all we've gone through as a party, I want to especially thank the humour and good grace of the member from Wood River who always has a smile. Now he's not even paying attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The pranks from the member of Saskatoon Southeast, and of course my seatmate, the member from Saskatoon Sutherland, you make coming to work every day even better, and I thank you for that.

With such a large number of members, I know I haven't gotten to everyone. I only have so much time, and I want to get to the budget. But every single person here contributes something special to this team, and that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is why it works.

And as I've been thinking about this, I've realized that what makes our Premier special is that he embodies I think all of these things — compassion and empathy, political acumen, policy intellect, passion, and a good sense of humour. I think of him as not only a leader and a mentor, but as a friend. And I'm really excited to be a part of this next chapter under his leadership because we're going to do great things in Saskatchewan.

Now on to the issue at hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, it's interesting. Last year in my reply to the budget speech, I pointed out the fundamental inconsistencies in the opposition's critique of the budget. Those logical inconsistencies were that they simultaneously criticized debt, deficit, and investment in people. Last year I asked, which is it? And here we are again this year.

The opposition critic said, and I quote, "There is no plan in this budget. This government needed to make wise investments in Saskatchewan people to get our province back on track," and then moments later talks about debt and deficit levels. I don't know how anyone is supposed to take them seriously when their ability to construct a cohesive and very elementary economic argument is so obviously constrained.

I am confident that our government is on track to delivering on our three-year plan to get back to balance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it seems that the opposition is also on track to staying in opposition.

I could go on at length, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about investments in vulnerable people in this budget, the same targeted investments that have been criticized by the NDP for not doing enough. As my colleague, the Minister of Health, pointed out, many of the targeted investments we are making are precisely to help people avoid falling through the cracks. Investments into HIV, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is one of those.

But near and dear to me are the investments in kids that help prevent them from coming into our child welfare system. These include supports for autism, and as the Minister of Health

pointed out in his speech, investments into early screening and hearing detection for newborns. I would add that the investments this government has made into those who suffer from full or partial vision loss and the range of disability supports in general, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are thoughtfully delivered to ensure a strong quality of life in this province for some of our most vulnerable people.

On advanced education, the member from Saskatoon Nutana said, and I quote, "There's little hope offered in this budget for post-secondary students in Saskatchewan as well." As I will shortly lay out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to differ.

And perhaps the most egregious comments are these, and I quote: "We also looked for but did not find any inspiration in this budget," Mr. Deputy Speaker: "inspiration for entrepreneurship . . . 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. Deputy Speaker.

She then goes on with this, and I quote, "This government had an opportunity to inspire today's and next generations of inventors and entrepreneurs but they've missed it."

"Now what they did include," Mr. Deputy 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 . . . which will impact a very limited number of applicants."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the growing and young tech community in our province would be very interested to know that this is the NDP's view. I think the many, many young people who I talk to that don't want to punch a clock in their future but want to be masters of their own destiny and become entrepreneurs would be very, very interested in the NDP's view. And I think our existing entrepreneurial community would also be very interested in knowing that this is their view.

Saskatoon, the opposition critic's home city, is the second-fastest-growing tech hub in Canada outside the Kitchener-Waterloo area. This means our province is uniquely positioned in Western Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And we are a major exporter of resources, resources that the world wants. So if you take the combination of the STSI [Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive] and the Saskatchewan value-added agricultural incentive, we have a potent combination — the kind of potent combination that produces the kind of work that Ag-West Bio is doing or Trent at SeedMaster is doing with autonomous tractors.

You see, just because the NDP doesn't understand a growth incentive like the Saskatchewan tech start-up incentive doesn't mean it is, and I quote, "no one else's inspiration." And to go on to refer to it as ill-conceived flies in the face of the many, many entrepreneurs through the leadership of Co.Labs and SaskTech, who pushed hard for this.

There really is nothing complex or ill-conceived about the STSI, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is pretty straightforward in fact. We're providing a 45 per cent tax incentive, which is designed

to address the shortage of capital for early-stage start-ups. Of importance, eligible start-ups must be in Saskatchewan and half their employees need to be located in the province. It is a two-year pilot using funds we already have in Innovation Saskatchewan. This helps us create an important pathway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is a pathway towards further economic diversification, innovation, and growth.

That pathway is actually well paved through a number of significant and thoughtful policy choices we have made. We start with the introduction of coding in the K to 12 curriculum. Then in the post-secondary sector, we expand computer science seats and spur an entrepreneurial research culture by leveraging the Saskatchewan Advantage innovation funding that we have. Twenty projects, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have been funded through this program, which have in turn attracted 27 million in private investment, almost 2 million in federal investment, and just over 8 million of our own investment. The total return on investment on the basis of the funds that we've leveraged, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is 258 per cent — 258 per cent.

Then we have the patent box legislation, which helps our research community patent and commercialize the products of their work to help build the knowledge economy. And now we also have the STSI, which helps early-stage start-ups access capital right here at home. You see, Saskatchewan was the only jurisdiction that didn't have a start-up incentive like this, and so we lost and were at risk of losing more young people who simply pursued their entrepreneurial dreams elsewhere because accessing angel investment was more attractive elsewhere. We've changed that because we want our young people to grow and thrive right here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The member opposite from Saskatoon Riversdale argued in her speech that we've ignored female entrepreneurs, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well about a third of the entrepreneurs in this province are female. Seven of the 37 companies that have gone through the Co.Labs Incubator have had female founders. Contango Strategies, one of those initiatives that we have funded through the Saskatchewan Advantage Fund for Innovation, is led by two female founders who do the important work of using technological applications to help clean up water at mine sites and around the world.

And let's take it a step further to include RoboYou, a program which is introducing robotics and coding to First Nations students on two reserves here in the province of Saskatchewan so that those students can be part of the third wave of technology opportunities in this province. There's no doubt we have more work to do, but these are moves in the right direction, and we're going to keep going. If that is not trusting to provide hope and inspiration, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know what is.

And it's just one more example of the lack of serious, thoughtful reflection on behalf of the members opposite. You can't just shoot randomly at everything in sight, hoping you'll hit a target, if you want to be considered the government in waiting, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Our investment into this particular pathway around technology and growing our entrepreneurial ecosystem, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is inspiring and exciting. We are living in an age

where our use of the digital world means we're contributing to data, the accumulation of data in real time. Every single time we like a post, conduct a search, share a photo, or make an online purchase, we're contributing to a data profile. Our kids are going to have a lifetime of this, and it'll allow for longitudinal research the likes of which we've never, ever before seen.

Now there are certain risks to privacy associated with this as we're seeing in the United States, but there are also great opportunities for us to harness both macro and micro data in real time in order to make better decisions as a government about the interventions that actually work to help people and grow our economy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is work that we're undertaking right now in the government under the leadership of Dale McFee.

As a global exporter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Internet can literally become a shared language. Right now I could travel anywhere in the world and converse because I can type a phrase into Google Translate on my phone, which can spit that phrase out in 90 languages as fast as any connection speed will allow, which is all part of the growth of voice-based virtual assistants.

The growth of mobile apps alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has been phenomenal. There are billions of smartphone users in the world and on average, each of these has 28 to 32 apps on their phone. Those apps have been created by computer coders, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The growth in as-a-service business models, like locally owned Best Food Forward or Local & Fresh, enable local food subscription services that effectively build an end-to-end supply chain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And there is, despite the opposition critic's charge that we have nothing on renewables and sustainabilities, a lot of entrepreneurial movement in the circular economy.

Just look at the work that Saskatchewan-based Cleanfarms is doing around grain bag recycling — work that has been made possible in part by funding from the Ministry of Agriculture — or about the very exciting opportunities to collaborate and innovate that the protein supercluster will bring.

I am so very proud to be part of a party on this side of the Assembly who has a very thoughtful plan on how to manage our economy and continue to grow for the next generation of Saskatchewan citizens.

We aren't going to just lead, Mr. Deputy Speaker; we're going to thrive, and I'm really excited to play my part in it. And for all of these reasons, I am very proud to support this budget and the work of our extraordinary Finance minister and her team, and I will not be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Elphinstone-Centre.

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As ever, it's good to take my place in this Assembly that's been entrusted to me by the people of Regina Elphinstone-Centre, and to have a few words to say in this debate on the budget motion.

Now it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the rhetoric that gets deployed every year for the budget, certainly that "on track" was chosen as the theme for this budget. I'll have more to comment upon, but first, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start with some words of congratulations and condolence and thanks.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, too, as many members in this place have said, we stand here in the midst of tragedy. We stand here carrying out the people's business as funerals are taking place, and as life-and-death struggles are being fought in hospitals, Mr. Speaker. We set about the people's business here in this Chamber as moms, as dads, as siblings, as children are returning home where there are dinner tables that won't see people coming home anymore. And that, as has been said, the kind of heartbreak that's involved in that, Mr. Speaker, is horrible to behold. And I just want to add my voice to those extending condolence, extending prayers and wishes for better days to come, Mr. Speaker, for those that have been right there in the jaws of this tragedy.

[20:45]

And, Mr. Speaker, I know that there's certainly been others speak much more eloquently on this score than I, but everyone's got a connection into this tragedy in this province. And it's a horrible thing to behold, but the resilience, the determination, the courage, and that ever-stronger light in the darkness that comes from Humboldt to light right across the globe, Mr. Speaker, is an amazing thing to behold as well. And I won't belabour the point any longer than that.

I know that there's some things in life that you get through but you never get over. And I know there are a lot of people in this Chamber that know that dynamic all too well. But they show up here and they carry on. And I think it was a wonderful thing that the SJHL [Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League] championships are under way, and we wish them all the best in that. We wish the families and the communities and those that were there on the front lines of that tragedy, in terms of health care professionals, Mr. Speaker, we wish them all nothing but strength and grace and continued courage in the days and years to come. And again that you might get through something like this, but you never get over it.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of, again, those that have persevered in the face of this tragedy, that have set about discharging their responsibilities, I too will carry on in my speech and continue to try and do my part as we set about the people's business in this Legislative Assembly for the great province of Saskatchewan, and try to do my part in terms of living up to the trust that has been extended to me by my friends and neighbours in Regina Elphinstone-Centre.

And, Mr. Speaker, in doing that work, I want to say a few words of congratulations. Again, this speech being a time when you are able to incorporate some of these broader things into the speech, my list of bouquets will not be as extensive as the member's from Regina University, but I do want to say a word of congratulations . . . There are a number of self-nominators in the room tonight, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see the hands going up. But I do want to say a word of congratulations, certainly.

I want to say some thanks to our outgoing Speaker for the work

that he'd done to help us in the pursuit of the people's business. I want to say thanks to all those that put their names forward to seek that role out.

I want to say a special word of thanks to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the work that you continue to do on our behalf. Again, I haven't been here forever, but I've been here for a while and I've seen some things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And you know, I think after seeing some small part of yourself serving as the Chair for the Human Services Committee for bills 5 and 6, early on in the life of the then-new Wall government, I thought that was like a lifetime achievement award in the offing right there. But anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the work that you continue to do.

I congratulate our new Speaker and wish him well in gainsaying the rights and responsibilities of we, the members, as we set out to do the people's business.

I want to say a word of congratulations to the new members from Melfort, from Kindersley, and from Swift Current. I'm also looking to Swift Current for updates on the . . . We've got a score coming in: 4 to 0, 4 to 0. It's looking good for the Swift Current Broncos. I had a bit of side bet going on this game, Mr. Speaker. I thought maybe this one they'd pick to go into quadruple overtime, but not to be.

But in seriousness, Mr. Speaker, congratulations to those members as they take their place and as they set about serving their constituents. And may they bring honour and results for the people that sent them to this Assembly.

Again, Mr. Speaker, in . . . You know, it's always a good time to be thankful, and I certainly have a lot to be thankful about in my life in terms of the people that I work with and in terms of the strength and love and the nurturing that I draw from family and friends. And, Mr. Speaker, I am so thankful for the tremendous amount of help that is given to me because I'm not an easy case to deal with, Mr. Speaker, and I could extend that certainly to my caucus colleagues.

And I guess this is a good a point as any to say congratulations to those that undertook leadership on the other side of the aisle. We've got a new Deputy Premier. He's looking well rested. I don't know what's going on over there. Marked, marked improvement over the old Deputy Premier, Mr. Speaker . . . But you can tell there's such a thing as being too truthful in politics sometimes, Mr. Speaker.

But seriously, Mr. Speaker, in truth, congratulations to the new Premier, the member from Rosthern-Shellbrook, and we wish him well in that job. We wish him many successes but not of course after the next election. But anyway, Mr. Speaker, we wish all members well as they figure out where the handle is and all the new jobs that go on over there.

But as well, Mr. Speaker, on our side of the House we've undertaken a leadership . We had a vigorous contest. The member from Saskatoon Meewasin emerged as the leader, and I congratulate him in that and wish him well in terms of bringing what he has to offer the people of Saskatchewan to bear. And I wish him wisdom and forbearance and patience certainly, Mr. Speaker, in that important job as the Leader of Her Majesty's

Loyal Opposition. And again I wish him success in that work, but I wish certainly continued success and on to bigger and better things. But that of course is for the people to decide.

And we're here tonight, and it may surprise you to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we're here to debate the budget. Now I guess I'm glad that we're here to debate a budget, because certainly two years ago at this time — or, you know, two years plus a couple of weeks — we had undertaken a provincial election where the people of Saskatchewan were not afforded that full look at the books that comes with a budget, Mr. Speaker. And certainly, you know, I would submit that in terms of what was put forward by members opposite in terms of that campaign, it wasn't the full bill of goods, Mr. Speaker.

And I guess a lot of the chickens come home to roost in last year's budget. Which I was interested to hear the member from Regina University go on about the virtues of that budget, Mr. Speaker, because if memory serves, that was a budget that saw that member playing host to a rally that took place outside of her constituency office, where hundreds of people came forward to say that what that government was doing around libraries was absolutely wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I think she had said something to the effect of, you know, there were going to be some of those members not coming back.

And I'm glad to see, Mr. Speaker, that that was changed in this year's budget. I was glad to see they retreated in disarray from that particular measure last year, Mr. Speaker, and I'm glad to see that that's been made whole in this year's budget. But again, Mr. Speaker, it's not like people have very short memories. People remember these things around the province. And again in terms of measures in this year's budget and it's again, you know, this is not to say that there aren't good things in this budget. And certainly there are good things in this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I'll get to some of those as we go along here.

But I think of things like the . . . Well to start, for a budget that is supposedly on track, you know, there's been a lot of talk in the last few days about thanks for the public servants and all the work that they do. And of course last year, Mr. Speaker, they had those public servants lined up for a \$250 million wage cut. They wanted to take 3.5 per cent off it and, you know, it wasn't sure if there were going to be Wallidays or if they were going to take it off the top or how that was going to be done. And it was something that you could question it for hours on end in committee, Mr. Speaker, but they never came forward with a good answer.

And so this year of course they've retreated from that and they're moving instead to eliminate \$70 million of expenditure over two years, \$35 million a year — 15 million out of the public service, and 20 million out of the Crown sector. And again, Mr. Speaker, I'll be interested to see how that is accomplished given the lack of answers that were forthcoming around questions we had about the quarter of a billion dollars that they're going to take out of the public service. Whereas instead, what's the point in the division between the public service and the Crown sector because of course the Crown sector . . .

And you can see it in their documents, Mr. Speaker, in terms of,

oh, the net income that they're counting on — the Auto Fund, SGI, SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority], SaskPower Corporation, SaskTel, SaskEnergy — the dollars that this government is counting on those entities to underwrite their budget, Mr. Speaker. And some of them in the face of, you know, sending those very corporations out to do . . . pass legislation to increase their borrowing limits, Mr. Speaker, so that those entities can borrow money to meet in part the increased revenue expectations that this government has to underwrite their budget.

So is that an on-track thing, Mr. Speaker? Is that on track to add more debt to the Crowns and add to the debt picture that has us at \$20 billion and rising? I would submit so is that in the case of SaskPower, where arguably we're already paying a carbon tax. So you know, they can jack themselves up all they like on that score, Mr. Speaker, but in terms of what's happened around carbon capture and storage and the way that that cost has been passed onto the ratepayer, Mr. Speaker, that's already in the mix.

And again they can tilt at Trudeau all they like, Mr. Speaker, but I guess that beats having to look in the mirror and say, you know, what have our bad choices resulted in in terms of costs being passed on to the people of Saskatchewan.

[21:00]

And again, Mr. Speaker, in terms of this budget being on track, well we'll believe it when we see it because of course, you know . . . And even when you don't see it, the way that this government's hid from the budget, kept that under the table, and then bluffed their way through an election. Again people, you know, they've got busy lives, they've got a lot of things to take care of, but the people will not be fooled and the truth will come out, Mr. Speaker. People will understand these things for what they are.

So again I think back to the libraries last year. And we had a lot of great lectures coming from members opposite about how this was a modernizing move and how this was something that needed to take place to, I don't know, that the digital age was overtaking us and that there's no place for libraries anymore. And of course the people weren't buying that, and so they had to dismount and here we are again today, Mr. Speaker. Or I think of the \$54 million that were cut from classrooms. And of course that's presented as the \$30 million to come in this year's budget.

And again, Mr. Speaker, there are good things happening in the K to 12 education budget in this province. And I was certainly glad to be there for the grand opening of the gym. I thought the Minister of Education gave a fine speech on that day. And it was a joyous day for the community because there at Sacred Heart Community School in the heart of north central Regina is a school with 450-plus students, two-thirds to three-quarters of them indigenous. There are kids from around the world as part of that student body, Mr. Speaker. This is a school where the educators continually win wars for innovation and doing great things in the sector.

I'm just trying to give the Minister of Education some props here, Mr. Speaker. In terms of things that I couldn't agree more

with in this budget, this was one of them. It was a great day. They have a wonderful atrium at Sacred Heart, Mr. Speaker, where the assemblies are conducted. And you look up and you see all those kids and you think about the future for those kids and the way that, you know, there was such great work being done at the school beforehand, Mr. Speaker. And if you can give Saskatchewan people generally the tools, they get the job done. And to give these kids a first-class education at a first-class institution, what wonderful things they will accomplish.

So I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker: it was a wonderful day for the community. I was glad to see the way that the voice of the community had spoken up and spoken up forcefully and repeatedly, Mr. Speaker, and the way that in this circumstance the government responded to it and this beautiful day could transpire. So far be it from me, Mr. Speaker, when I see something right, you know, I just want to make sure that I'm not some braying donkey that is always against things. But I want to say and go on record as, you know, that was the right thing to do on the part of the government. And I thank the Minister of Education and through him the government generally for that wonderful day.

I also want to say that there's some great work done at the opening of the *mâdawêyatitân* centre. *mâdawêyatitân* is *nêhiyaw*, it's Cree for "let's all be together," Mr. Speaker. And I know that there have been some things said in this building about announcements that get made over years, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, I was part of a government that put forward \$2 million of planning money for that very institution. And it took a few turns around the block coming into the final throes, Mr. Speaker, over a decade, over a decade. And you know, it's interesting . . . Again members have talked about different of the problems they have with the way that the announcement machine gets cranked up at election time, and certainly, Mr. Speaker, we saw some of that go on in Elphinstone.

And the bottom line, though, is this: *mâdawêyatitân*, let's all be together, and the shared facility that is Scott Collegiate, and the way that those kids have a first-class high school to go to, that . . . It's partnered in with Albert library. It's partnered in with the community centre. You know, would that the health component had been part of that project, but that day is going to come, Mr. Speaker. But the way that the community and the different partners rallied together to make sure that that project stayed on track and finally came into being, and that those students have a first-rate high school to go to, it's a wonderful thing, Mr. Speaker.

So we look forward to many continued successes from those students, and again from . . . I think of people like Principal Shannon Fayant and her staff and the folks that are there day in, day out and deal with challenges that are maybe not part of the mix in a lot of other places in this province, Mr. Speaker, but the way that they bring so much love and dedication to bear, I think this is an institution that is going to make a tremendous impact on my home community of North Central. And we wish nothing but success for *mâdawêyatitân*, again in *nêhiyaw*, "let's all be together." It's a great thing, Mr. Speaker.

So there are good things happening in the budget. I don't know if I've made that clear. But there are some other things that, on

balance . . . And it's always a balancing act; you try and sift these things through, Mr. Speaker. And you try to wonder how a smart, committed public servant like the member from Saskatoon Northwest could buy in for the whole package but, you know, there they are, buying in for the whole package.

And again, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what's to come for the days ahead, I guess I'd start off with a little matter in the lead-up to the 2007 election. This is a government that promised to be the most open and accountable government in the history of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. You know any time the rhetoric gets that overblown in politics, Mr. Speaker, I'd suggest you should check your wallet. I'd suggest you should check the record. I suggest you should check what's actually happening.

Because, of course, what has this most open and accountable government afforded us in this budget, Mr. Speaker? Well to start with, in the budget briefing, you know, the first move was to say, hey we've never provided copies of the budget in the budget technical briefing. And of course, Mr. Speaker, it took some back and forth, and then we finally got copies of the budget because that's always been part of the mix. You sign your embargo; you get a copy of the budget. Sometimes there's some turns on the road there but anyway, Mr. Speaker, that's the way it works.

And then the next thing you notice when you get a copy of the budget is, well I'll be darned, one of the big initiatives for this budget is what's happening with the public service. The full-time equivalents that are, you know, that have been traditionally listed as part of each line department estimate in the Estimates book, where the rubber hits the road, Mr. Speaker, in terms of expenditure and the various sub-departments and what's the full-time equivalent public service component that's attached to that particular ministry. And of course, Mr. Speaker, for the most open and accountable government in the history of Saskatchewan, well this is the first year, the first year that they've taken that vital piece of information out of the budget Estimates book, Mr. Speaker.

Well you know, I don't think it was like . . . When you make a promise like we're going to be the most open and accountable government in the history of Saskatchewan, it's not like . . . There isn't some kind of asterisk where you can claim reverse day or, you know, we really meant the exact opposite, Mr. Speaker. So again for a budget where you'd think the public service is coming in for a significant amount of the heavy lifting to get this budget down the road, you'd think that it'd be a funny one to pick for the first time they've taken the full-time equivalent component out of the budget estimates, Mr. Speaker. But there it was. There it was.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we were afterwards provided a single sheet of paper listing the full-time equivalents, you know, ministry by ministry. And you know, that's information that's usually been in the budget. So again, Mr. Speaker, what have they got to hide? Why do they want to make us so suspicious like this?

Something else, Mr. Speaker. I think about the . . . One of the balloons that they floated before the budget was the Minister for Central Services talked about how there were 660 government properties that, you know, that was (a) too many; and that (b)

make him an offer. And again, Mr. Speaker, you know, we'd like to know what the rationale is for that. We'd like to know what the list is, for one, which is information that should be readily available. But of course when we ask the question in here, that information isn't provided. When we ask the written question, it's ordered so they can sit on it for six months. So again, I don't know if the Deputy Premier's got the memo over there, but if he's got the list, send it over. You know, we're interested. These are the people's assets. So like, get with the program.

Mr. Speaker, these 660 assets that, you know, were rhymed off as too many, again, maybe there's a rationale there. It's not like these things are written in stone, but it leads into broader questions, like what's happening with the sound stage. And again the sound stage, which was critical infrastructure for a once-thriving film industry here in the province of Saskatchewan that . . . You know, this government saw fit to put a stake through the heart of that industry. It's a shadow of what it once was. But you know, if that industry is going to revive, it counts on the sound stage.

And so that the sound stage was brought forward as an example of this part of this 660 list, Mr. Speaker, caused a lot of concern for a lot of people, both in and out of the province, that look forward to a day when the film industry perhaps will be revived, will perhaps regain its former glory and add jobs, add value, add revenues to the province of Saskatchewan. They look forward to that day, Mr. Speaker. But you know, they couldn't get a straight answer from the minister on what's even the 660 list, let alone what's going to happen to the sound stage, which has already been reviewed by government, Mr. Speaker. And they talked to hundreds of people in the process of that review.

We look at other decisions the government's made, Mr. Speaker. I think of the takeover of Wascana Centre, the way that that partnership, which extends back decades to the '60s, Mr. Speaker — there had been a tripartite arrangement between the university, the city of Regina, and the provincial government — again when that took place, there was a lot of speculation, and some of it by people that ran for that party to seek office, Mr. Speaker, as to what that would mean in terms of large-scale, wholesale commercialization in the park.

And again, Mr. Speaker, you look at this and you think, okay, so cash-strapped government in desperate fiscal straits plus public assets, you know, how could this possibly go wrong? You know, what do you think's going to happen here?

So, Mr. Speaker, we've already seen one case where there's a project that's nearly five times the size of the envelope that's been green-lit, and we'll see what else is to come in terms of the way that this government is exercising its new-found, newly assumed control over Wascana Centre, Mr. Speaker. And I tell you what, people in Regina very much value that park. And I don't think it's a mistake, Mr. Speaker, that there is a Saskatoon MLA that was put in charge of that proposition, removing a Regina member from that circumstance. You know, how does that add up?

So we'll see. We'll be watching very closely, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what the immediate future will bring around the fire sale of public assets, and in this case as it regards the jewel of

the crown in the Queen City, Mr. Speaker, Wascana Park. And again, these are things, these are moves that this government didn't campaign on, didn't ask the people for a mandate. They just went ahead and bowled their way forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, on these and on other fronts — again in terms of the different sort of lectures that we've been subjected to over the years by members of this government about things that they said were great, that were world class and leading this nation, and so on and so forth — I think of what's happened with the GTH, Mr. Speaker, and the way that that has been, you know, alternately defended and then sort of hidden by members opposite in terms of what the public documents that come forward have to say in terms of what the selective reading of the different assessments that have gone on, Mr. Speaker, the way that there is differing opinions on a public inquiry, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what happened at the GTH and how we as the people of Saskatchewan can find out what truly happened there. And again, Mr. Speaker, that is an account to be reckoned, Mr. Speaker. It's an account to be reconciled.

[21:15]

Mr. Speaker, I think also about what's happening on the front of reconciliation. And again in terms of the future for indigenous Saskatchewan, their success is Saskatchewan's success, Mr. Speaker. And as long as we have, you know, an employment situation where you have 20 per cent unemployment for First Nations and you don't even count what's happening on-reserve, Mr. Speaker, where we know for a fact that the situation is much worse, Saskatchewan will suffer accordingly.

As long as you have disparity between the way that tuition on reserve has a disparity for that off reserve, you'll continue to have Saskatchewan suffer. As long as you have a child welfare system where the support that is on offer is not there in an equitable and fair way that has been again argued and adjudicated many times in the recent past, Mr. Speaker, that's going to see Saskatchewan not live up to its full potential. So these are things where, you know, in the terms of the broad work of reconciliation, Mr. Speaker, there's so much work to be done.

And I think about again, some of the members have touched on this, education is one of these great levellers that we have in society. And as long as you take \$54 million out of the classroom, put 30 million back, and expect to have a party thrown for you, Mr. Speaker, it's a bit of a magic act. And I know the member from Saskatoon Northwest is a charming guy, but in terms of even keeping up with inflation, Mr. Speaker, I know his math's better than that. I know that he knows there's still a shortfall out there.

So again I think Saskatchewan people are giving that new Minister of Education a fair shot. And I think he benefits from some of the past comparisons, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the various charm offensives that have been launched by that government out into the classrooms. But, Mr. Speaker, the math will not be denied. The fact of the matter is that this government, I don't care what new math they're bringing in with the curriculum, you know, 54 minus 30 does not equal good times in the classroom. There are front lines that suffer in the classroom. And in terms of what's happening with inflation,

again the member knows this. The minister knows this. Would that he was part of a government that knows this, Mr. Speaker, and instead would look to their own mistakes, their own costly boondoggles to make up the shortfall in their budgets, Mr. Speaker.

I guess the last topic that I'd like to touch on, Mr. Speaker, is what's happening with the rental supplement. And again, you know, we've come through a budget last year where the then minister of Social Services had to preside over so many heartless cuts in that package that she had to protest that she has a heart. Like it's quite the thing, Mr. Speaker.

And many, many of those cuts were indeed heartless. And sometimes collective government is a harsh thing. And sometimes you as a cabinet minister get to have a choice as to, are you going to go out and carry the line or are you going to resign? And that minister chose to carry on, and fair enough. But in terms of the people that that government sought to take the money out of, it makes you question the values of that government, Mr. Speaker. And in terms of what's happening now with the rental supplement, where you're going to take the rental supplement out of the equation without having something there for folks to land on, folks that are already in some of the most straitened circumstances of anyone in Saskatchewan . . .

And I guess this is a good place as well to say, Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you very much to the Minister of Social Services. And I want to say thank you to his staff, his hard-working staff, Mr. Speaker. Because out of Elphinstone, we deal with that minister's office probably on the order of once a day, and often it's not already on questions that have to do with the rental supplement.

So, Mr. Speaker, in terms of how things are working with that government . . . And the minister referenced this earlier on, where there are a tremendous number of vacancies in Regina housing units. And again, this is a question that we'd asked the government and they ordered it, Mr. Speaker. They ordered it so they could sit on it for another six months in terms of where those vacancies are. Now we don't know why that is but, you know, in terms of that information being part of the deliberative process that is this Assembly, it would be helpful information to have before the people's representatives.

But in terms of the rental supplement itself, that they want to take \$5 million out of a circumstance and offer up some yet-to-be-determined federal support that is not in place, Mr. Speaker, I think is going to make a tough situation for many people all the more harder.

And again, Mr. Speaker, I'm thankful for all the great work that gets done, and I'm thankful for the commitment to improving people's lives. And there are other measures in that budget that are certainly well placed, Mr. Speaker, but this is a measure that, to me, has the look of the trade-offs that go on at cabinet time, at budget finalization time, and that are not in keeping with, I think, the way that people do this work. But, Mr. Speaker, mark my words, this is going to make a tough situation all the more tough for folks who have it tough as it is.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I could go on even longer, but I know that others want to take part in this debate, and I certainly

wouldn't want to stand in the way of that. But, Mr. Speaker, again you balance these things out. You know, there can be good things in a package. But this is a confidence measure in the life of this government. And this particular government, Mr. Speaker, I would submit, gained its mandates by not being totally square with the people of Saskatchewan and hiding their budget circumstance. And we keep finding out more and more about what the books really look like as time goes on.

So, Mr. Speaker, for that and other reasons, I'll certainly be supporting the amendment put forward by the member from Nutana, and I'll be voting against this budget.

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

Mr. Tochor: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd like to start off with a couple of thank yous. I'd like to thank my family back home: Jacob and James and my wife, Danielle. It's been a busy couple of months, and Danielle has just been a rock star in making it all possible. So thank you so much.

Carrying on the thank yous, I think we need to thank the Pages that are in here today. They do a heck of a job. I'd like to thank Hansard as well for making sure everything's recorded properly and the good work that Hansard does. I don't want to miss anyone here. Ross, thank you so much for keeping us safe and for everyone in security. To Kathy and Iris, thank you so much for the Clerks for making sure things are run properly.

To our member from North Battleford for his never-give-up attitude, and then the member from Cut Knife-Turtleford probably should give up. We . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No, she was thanked. And then our good member from Canora-Pelly, just a fantastic person and a great cook and a good friend. And I'm so happy that I got to know him a little bit since he got elected.

And we have three new friends from Swift Current, from Melfort, and from Kindersley. Just great individuals, and they're the future of our party and of our government. We're in good hands. Make sure I don't forget anyone to thank. Saskatoon University, which is a . . . That's a stout, very . . . person. Eric is someone that is — oh, sorry — the Saskatoon University member is just a gem of an individual. And that's I think all the thank yous that I needed to do here.

Oh, to Regina Elphinstone, thank you so much. When I was in the role of Speaker, we've had lots of good conversations. And I still owe you a free dinner because I ruled against you on the spot. And afterwards, after reflection I knew, and I shared this with him, that I erred in judgment, and I still owe you that dinner. So I think that's everybody in here.

I believe there is another member who was a little bit maybe unserious thanking people. She thanked everyone else here but those members, I think. All kidding aside, let's talk about the budget, which is fabulous . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I burn bridges. From the member from Sutherland, he should know that, and I remember what you did.

So we get to this budget. The best way to, you know, analyze a budget is look at the different lenses. And for me the lenses that

I put through this budget is one for our retirees, our seniors in the province. And that lens I put on it is through my parents. What's in here for my parents?

And before I get into how I think they're viewing this budget, I think I'd like to make an announcement about my father actually, which some of you probably knew that he has been fighting cancer for the last year. And he went through chemo, and then after Christmas he actually fell and busted his leg. Emergency ambulance to Regina, and thankfully great people at Regina General put him back together. He stopped his chemo treatments for three months, and just last week we found out he's cancer free.

So a little bit of bright news on such a gloomy province for the last couple of . . . since the tragic accident up in Humboldt. This is my first time since to rise on my feet to also share my condolences and thoughts and prayers with everyone that's been affected by the tragedy in Humboldt.

Other lenses that I would put this budget through would be the next generation, which would be the kids and the people of . . . maybe my sons, Jacob and James. So Jacob is four and James is three now. And those are the two lenses I think I'm going to put just a quick run-through of this budget and what that means for those two groups.

So controlling spending. We're controlling spending where we're 1.4 per cent lower than last year. And why that's important, I think, first off for the next generation is that we realize that we can't have this reckless spending. I know in other provinces and even the federal government seemingly have forgotten the lessons of the '90s and how reckless spending really put every province and the country in a terrible spot. Regardless of political stripe, it took tough measures to bring it back to balance. So I think for looking at that line item and looking at spending, I believe my two kids, the next generation, will be well served with a budget that restrains spending.

We're also finding savings. One of the ways that we are finding savings is we have reduced the number of government-owned vehicles. That's over a \$5 million savings annually.

Another area of controlling spending is going down to one health region. And Health is such an important ministry for everyone involved. And be it for my kids, that next generation, or maybe more so reflective on my father who just, as I shared, just went through fighting and beating cancer. Well our health budget is now the largest it has ever been, and since 2007 the Cancer Agency has doubled in the support from the provincial government.

And I'm not saying that's why we were fortunate as a family to have a success story with my father beating cancer, but it's something to think about, that what we've been able to do though with a decade growth is actually make those investments that do change people's lives. I'm very, very thankful that we've done that.

One of the important things I believe that's not in this budget is a carbon tax. Mr. Speaker, every province that has brought in a carbon tax, their emissions have gone up. It is a ridiculous

approach to climate change. We've seen it in the country of Australia. They introduced a carbon tax. Two years later they removed it. I'm very thankful that, with the direction the things are going nationally and with some provinces, I believe that we're going to be able to stand up to Justin Trudeau's carbon tax and Saskatchewan will not have a carbon tax.

[21:30]

When we're comparing budgets, it's important to look at choices and what other provinces have done and what have been the results. And I remember back probably a year ago, I was at a CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association] conference and I had opportunity to sit down with an MLA that was from the government of Alberta NDP government. They brought out their budget last year and we brought out ours, and over dinner we were talking about the different approaches. And she was quite certain that the idea of keep spending and don't worry about it, this is what governments should do when times get tough, and Alberta, you'll see. And she made reference that, you know what, you guys are going on the wrong paths.

And if you remember last budget, we controlled spending. There was different measures that were tough, but put us on a better track, a track to balance.

And at the end of the dinner, we're kind of concluding our discussions on which approach will be ultimately successful. And she asked, well there's no way of telling, you know, if Saskatchewan's on the right path or Alberta. And I turned to her and I said, well you'll tell if you get re-elected at the next election.

And it'll be interesting. In a year and a half and a bit, Alberta's going to be going to the polls and the people of Alberta will decide. Did the NDP government that went reckless spending in Alberta, that proposes a carbon tax or is bringing in a carbon tax, the voters in that province will have a clear distinction on what it would be like to have a free enterprise, right-of-centre party such as the Saskatchewan Party or United Conservatives in Alberta.

And I know my esteemed member from Elphinstone talked about elections, and if only this came out or if only the people know this, and this was . . . [inaudible] . . . Well you know what? People in Saskatchewan will know. Saskatchewan, when we go to the polls in 2020, they are going to have the example of Alberta, of reckless spending and what comes next, because we've all lived through the '90s where every political stripe overspent and it meant really tough decisions for the government.

And I know we rail away on the NDP in Saskatchewan about the 52 hospitals and the 176 schools that they had to close, but that's because of the reckless spending. And there is another analogy on that one too between the two provinces, because Alberta was facing very similar pressures in the '90s as well. They didn't close rural schools. They didn't close hospitals. They restrained spending, and under their premier, Ralph Klein, did a fantastic job in bringing things back to balance — much quicker than Saskatchewan, mind you — without killing rural Saskatchewan. So think about that for a bit. The decisions they

made when they were in government were calculated. They calculated that they could write off rural Saskatchewan, close those hospitals, kill those towns, and it wouldn't hurt.

Now when we compare that to what Alberta did — and the reductions they did in Alberta were across the board — they didn't close schools; they didn't close hospitals; they didn't kill rural Alberta. They looked at concrete numbers and said, you know what? It's tough. We're going to take a reduction. We're taking 5 per cent . . . bang. And over time it was proven that they came out of the recession . . . or out of deficit quicker than Saskatchewan. And I believe that those are two parallel provinces that people will analyze going forward even after this set. It's a good enough comparison as, what did Alberta do for the first 60 years, or what did this province do? And it will be shown that this party and past right-of-centre parties put this province on a different track, that if we would have kept on going, we would have been in a much better place.

I've been informed by my Deputy House Leader that because other members went long, that I could cut it short. So I would like to thank her for making mention of that, and I'd like to put on the record that I will be supporting the budget and not the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Parks, sport, and recreation.

Hon. Mr. Makowsky: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join the debate this evening. My colleagues here, we're coming up past 9:30, past my bedtime here, but we're doing the good work of the people of the province of Saskatchewan. So again, always a pleasure to join in the budget debate on behalf of the people of Regina Gardiner Park this evening.

As several other members have done, I'd like to say a few thank yous. You don't get to get on your feet too often to talk about these people important to you and the folks behind the scenes, or right at the front of the scenes, that help you out. And right at the front of that list of course is my family, very important to me.

I have three sons and they're all very busy. And my oldest son just started spring league football. It certainly doesn't seem like spring league from years past. I was out watching a few times. I wasn't able to coach this year; I'm too busy at work here. But it's interesting to watch at the fields at the U of R [University of Regina] players going to get overthrown balls over snowbanks taller than they are. So that's always an interesting sight to see. You lose track of them as they go over the snowbank, Mr. Speaker. And my other sons are . . . My middle son, Ryan, is involved in, coming up on three-on-three basketball. So it always keeps going.

And of course at the front of our family and leading our family is my wife, Tami. She's a nurse here with, in the province of Saskatchewan, I guess the new health authority. I was going to say Regina Qu'Appelle but that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. Works outside the home but, of course, lots of work . . . Just, I always say, at our place, Mr. Speaker, our fridge door is open more than it's closed. And just keeping that poor fridge stocked is a full-time job, and so that's . . . [inaudible interjection] . . .

Yes, I do my fair share in there as well. It should be less on my part. But of course she does a great job for our family. And of course we've been married, coming up next week, 19 years. So the time is going quickly as we saw our family continue to grow and we're very busy.

And I'm very fortunate to be a Regina member. I know my colleagues, they've mentioned before, the member from Carlton, how he's away from his family and that's so very difficult. We all are away but we're lucky enough, Regina members. Most of us get to go home in the evenings and at least see our family for a bit. So I commend those members that are away from their families for long stretches.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my constituency assistant. Brittany has been with me for over five years now. It's amazing how quickly the time rolls by. Speaking of my family, again, my oldest son's in grade 12 but I've been at this job for I think over six years now. So the time is clicking by, that's for sure.

There's a few members on this side that are less than six months into their careers, and what I've seen is very impressive so far from the members from Swift Current, Melfort, and Kindersley. Definitely good to have them part of our family, our family on the government side, and some very impressive wins. I think the member from Kindersley, if you took the results of my two elections — the victory spread in percentage — I think he was in excess of that in just his by-election. So that's good work and I look forward to what they will bring. And so far it's been very impressive.

I'd also like to commend the Minister of Finance who's served this province very well and certainly a very smart person and knows her files inside and out. And it's a pleasure to be on treasury board and watching her lead that group to this budget that is on track, Mr. Speaker.

So again our government, I think . . . Well I know we have a plan and that plan is on track as I mentioned. One year ago we took some difficult decisions we had to make, Mr. Speaker. We knew we couldn't just keep spending, Mr. Speaker, so we charted a three-year course to reduce Saskatchewan's dependency on resource revenue and balance the budget by 2019, the next budget cycle.

This year's budget keeps us on that plan, that track, by controlling government spending, as I mentioned previously, making important investments in priority areas — health care, social services, education — and keeping our economy strong through strategic investments in infrastructure and new business incentives.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very fortunate to be the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport and I think in that area of government a lot of the things we look at is the quality of life pieces for the people of the province of Saskatchewan. And like I said, I'm very honoured to serve in that role as the minister.

Mr. Speaker, the folks in our office, they do great work. Paul and Catherine and Brier and Jill, they do good work and very helpful for myself, being a new member of Executive Council. We have a lot of folks in that office that are new to government, or new to the building, but they are very eager and doing good

work on behalf of the people and certainly support me very much.

So again the quality of life things, Mr. Speaker. Through the budget we've been able to increase our capital budget in the parks area, Mr. Speaker, and that, I think, definitely has helped over the last decade of our government. Mr. Speaker, we've made a lot of investments in the parks in our province. Mr. Speaker, there's several upgrades that have taken place. Over \$100 million in the last decade has gone into our parks, Mr. Speaker, making a top-quality tourist destination, not only for people of Saskatchewan, but for people outside of Saskatchewan, and that helps again, as I mentioned before, enhance our quality of life.

I think back when I was a kid, Mr. Speaker, we went camping a lot. I grew up in Saskatoon, and Pike Lake was a very popular destination for us. We spent a heck of a lot of time there. I've great memories of going fishing and, you know, just hanging out at the beach and riding bikes and having fun with friends at the parks, Mr. Speaker.

I hadn't been able to do that for many years. Based on previous careers, it was difficult to get away in the summers. We just recently with my kids though, we've been taking day trips to parks around the Regina area, Rowan's and Buffalo Pound, etc., Mr. Speaker, and those are definitely fun times. My son Blake has definitely become a fishing aficionado. He is all over fishing and I'm not much of a fisherman, Mr. Speaker. So again we'll get out to those great parks we have in our province hopefully and get out and enjoy the outdoor time if we get into some spring-like weather here hopefully eventually, Mr. Speaker.

And again with the budget in the PCS [Parks, Culture and Sport] area, Mr. Speaker, we talk about some of the other third parties that deliver programming and great art and culture for our province, Mr. Speaker. I think of the Arts Board. It's the 70th year, Mr. Speaker, the oldest art advocacy and grant-funding program of its kind in Canada, Mr. Speaker, and certainly we're very proud of the work they do. Creative Saskatchewan, they do great work.

I think of all the third parties that are funded through the lottery trust fund, through Sask Sport, SaskCulture. And Sask Park and Recs Association, Mr. Speaker, again funds a great quality of life. It's seed money, that lottery funding, and it leverages so many volunteer hours and so many great folks out there that do great work and make our province truly what it is, Mr. Speaker.

[21:45]

I'll note many of those third party entities, they do great work in our communities of course. But with our young people, I think of . . . I don't know if I'll list them because I'll inevitably leave some out, but just off the top of my head, Mr. Speaker, the Regina Symphony Orchestra, Globe Theatre, all sorts of programs within Sask Sport. They obviously have their core audience and they do performances, etc., but they really reach out to young people through workshops, through having free performances for classrooms right across our province. So they do good work and that money, I think, is well spent. And again so a lot of status quo in terms of the budget for PCS, Mr.

Speaker.

Several of the members previous to me had talked about some of the important investments, some of the highlights. I'll just quickly go through maybe a few of those. And again we talked about in the health budget how important that budget is for the people of the province of Saskatchewan, biggest line item in our province and always has . . . It's similar to other provinces.

But again we talked about the 100 per cent coverage for HIV drugs, investments for a new program to ensure babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals are screened for hearing loss. And again a lot of talk and a lot of debate. 2.8 million is being provided to fulfill the 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. Very important investments in our people, Mr. Speaker, and also fulfills the Premier's commitment to increase education funding by 30 million, Mr. Speaker.

I note the Regina bypass again, a large part of the capital expenditure in the Ministry of Highways, though I disagree with the member from Athabasca, just to sort of brush it off and call it a semicircle around the city. I think it's certainly much more than that. I've driven east of the city where a lot of that project is complete and it's a very, very impressive project, Mr. Speaker. It's service roads, overpasses. I'm not sure how they do the engineering on that. It's an engineering marvel in my opinion and it's not done yet, more to come, Mr. Speaker.

It'll increase traffic, sorry, expedite traffic flow around the city of Regina, keep those big semis off of Victoria Avenue East in the heart of my constituency, Mr. Speaker. It will provide double-lane highway on the No. 1 and 110 kilometres so trucks won't have to slow down. Well it's so important in our province to get products to market efficiently and I think the biggest part of that entire project, and certainly on the east side of the city of Regina and the residents of White City, and the member from Wascana Plains certainly knows about it very well and talks about it frequently, is the safety aspect, Mr. Speaker.

I remember it was very difficult to get back into the city if you're coming from White City or Balgonie or Pilot Butte areas, Mr. Speaker. Some of those turns were long waits and very frustrating, not to mention very dangerous. So the bypass . . . but the overpasses in that area will most importantly improve safety, which is something that's obviously very important. So it's a little discouraging when the members opposite simply call it a, you know, a semicircle or dismiss it. I think that's a little bit irresponsible, Mr. Speaker.

The budget for social service and assistance increased by 25 million to a record 1.38 billion. Mr. Speaker, last year I heard the Leader of the Opposition — he gave his maiden speech in the Assembly — spoke a lot about social investments, and I'm quoting from *Hansard* here:

The ability to rebound [he said], 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.

So he's saying, don't cut back, keep the money flowing for

people that happen to be down on their luck and maybe using some aspect of social services. And then what he said last year . . . That's what he said last year.

He commented on the budget day, on a CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] article, and he said:

They're predicting, [I think he means us, and I go back to the quote] and even kind of boasting, about the highest social service budget in the province's history.

I don't know how that's something to boast about — that's the most people needing social assistance in our history, that's more people in poverty.

So I question if that member was serious about that statement, Mr. Speaker. They stand up, question after question, they demand more spending, and then they castigate the government over debt. You know how the Leader of the Opposition runs. Part of his platform was the two-and-a-half-billion-dollar spending pledge every single year. Ten billion over a four-year government, Mr. Speaker, all including a carbon tax.

Then the leader says this about our government's record to invest in social services. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure I agree with the Leader of the Opposition in his statements, Mr. Speaker. In less than a year he said, make sure you spend more. And then this year it's, why are they spending more? We see that question after question, time after time in the House, Mr. Speaker.

It was interesting also listening to the critic in her response to the budget, Mr. Speaker. Of all the things she was questioning, Mr. Speaker, she said she lamented that people in the province would have to spend PST [provincial sales tax] or have to pay PST on cannabis when it's legalized, Mr. Speaker. I can think of a lot of things maybe that you might have a decent argument about in terms of maybe an exemption for this or that from some sort of tax, but I rarely have heard up until then that people are saying, man, the government would be right on track if they gave an exemption to cannabis for some reason. I'm not sure why that member would advocate for that, Mr. Speaker.

Again the members of the opposition, they want more and more spending, and of course you need revenue in able to spend that, Mr. Speaker. So just like every other province that I've come across or listened to, their plan for cannabis includes PST. They want to, the members opposite want to have the government control the retailing and wholesaling. That's what I've heard from them. They want to increase . . . I imagine they want to of course control everything. They're interested in large government monopolies, the members opposite are, and part of the reason there is for revenue. And I imagine they'd want to have markups, etc. But they questioned, in the reply to the budget, they want to have an exemption for PST on cannabis. Not sure where that came from or why. Maybe we'll hear more about it. I don't know, Mr. Speaker.

But it appears my time is running out here, Mr. Speaker. I have a long list of things this government has been able to accomplish in the last few years, Mr. Speaker. I imagine there's partisan comments on each side of the House, and I appreciate that. That's the business we're in. We're in politics and we each

have our own opinions, obviously, maybe a little bit biased.

But I'd like to just quickly get into the record, Mr. Speaker, what debt bond rating service said about the government's plan to get back to balance. I'm going to quote here, and I'll read through this quickly:

The Province remains committed to the three-year plan to eliminate the deficit that was put forward in last year's budget. That plan included immediate revenue and expense measures and an ongoing effort to control expenditure growth in subsequent years. The plan was coherent and credible.

Those are pretty good words here. Back to quoting:

As was expected, the Province was not able to achieve all the targeted savings outlined in last year's plan, but the government has been responsive and made adjustments to keep the plan on track.

The government continues to reiterate the importance of balancing the provincial budget to ensure the longer-term sustainability of government programs and services. Having demonstrated its commitment to responsible fiscal policy, DBRS expects the Province will be successful in balancing the provincial budget in 2019-20, providing there are no meaningful economic or fiscal disruptions.

Mr. Speaker, this is certainly in contrast to many other provinces in the country. And I also point out — a lot of statistics here but my time is running out — about how we receive no equalization. Provinces in similar size receive billions and billions in order to help balance their budget. We do not have that luxury.

So, Mr. Speaker, this government's on track. It's on track to balance budget. It's on track for prosperity in the future, Mr. Speaker. Again DBRS [Dominion Bond Rating Service Ltd.], we'll take those experts in the field. We'll take their advice before we take the advice of the members opposite, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to again be the representative for the people of Regina Gardiner Park and on behalf of them I will be supporting the budget put forward by the Minister of Finance, the member from Humboldt. Thank you.

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

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm honoured to enter this budget debate, but before I do I want to take this opportunity to thank some very important people. First of all my mother who . . . I told her I would be on at prime time, 8 o'clock tonight. Now I've been bumped to the late show, so I apologize for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to congratulate the Speaker on his appointment. He wears the hat and robe proudly, and I know that he'll do a great job. It was a pleasure to have sat on the rural crime committee with the Speaker, and his expertise helped our mission immensely.

Now that being said, the member from Canora-Pelly last week in his statement . . . I thought I heard something, what he said, but anyway I went back to *Hansard* and I found what he had said. And if only I had known that the Speaker and the member from Canora-Pelly were part of the rural crime problem, it may have reduced some of the hours spent on this very important issue.

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, during our leadership campaign I was honoured to have been appointed minister of Government Relations, First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this time to recognize some of the staff in that ministry that made my life a lot easier with their professionalism and knowledge. They are, in no particular order, Shannon Andrews, Carla Taylor-Brown, Emma L'Heureux, Alicia Hubbard, Tennille Olson, Grant McLellan, and Launa Birnie.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize Deputy Minister Tammy Kirkland and all her officials for their guidance and very open conversation in all matters pertaining to Government Relations, like emergency measures, SAMA [Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency], community planning, First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs issues, and the list goes on. I thank you all.

Mr. Speaker, preparing a provincial budget is a long and trying task. I'd like to thank the Finance minister for her leadership through this process. The minister, along with treasury board members and all the ministries, have been going hard since the 2017-18 budget was introduced. Many difficult decisions had to be made, but at the end of the day a fair and realistic plan is on track. Mr. Speaker, a very special thank you to the Finance minister on her first budget, and to everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, the 2018 budget . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I didn't mean to wake him up but it's . . . Mr. Speaker, the 2018-19 budget keeps Saskatchewan on track to return to balance next year with major investments in health care, education, social services, and infrastructure, a steadily improving outlook over the next four years.

Mr. Speaker, our government has a plan and a plan that is on track. One year ago we charted a three-year course to reduce Saskatchewan's dependency on resource revenue and balance the budget by 2019. This year's budget keeps that plan on track by controlling government spending, making important investments in health care, education, social services, and by keeping our economy strong through investments in infrastructure and new business incentives.

Mr. Speaker, the 2018-19 budget invests in 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. At the same time 19 million in administration costs

were being saved by the amalgamation of the 12 health authorities, savings that are being reinvested in front-line services as part of the 72 million increased in operating funding.

Mr. Speaker, the government will provide additional 700,000 this year to ensure universal 100 per cent coverage of HIV drugs for Saskatchewan people and to provide other HIV supports. More than 520,000 is being invested in new programs to ensure that babies born in Saskatchewan hospitals are screened for hearing loss. And 2.8 million is being provided to fulfill the 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.

[22:00]

Mr. Speaker, this budget also fulfills the Premier's commitment to increase education funding by \$30 million. This will allow school divisions to continue to support students in the classroom by maintaining or hiring up to 400 teachers and other in-school professionals. Mr. Speaker, 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.

The budget also provides nearly 77 million in child care funding. This will support more than 16,000 existing licensed child care spaces in Saskatchewan and help create 2,500 more spaces by 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a few minutes on a few ministries and what is happening. I will start with Agriculture, which is very important to the province and the Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency. Mr. Speaker, the 2018 budget, '18-19 budget, invests 378.6 million to help ensure a strong agricultural sector, including a record investment in agriculture research and continuing strong support for business risk management programs such as crop insurance.

Mr. Speaker, the budget also includes increased funding for Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan, the organization that enforces Saskatchewan's animal protection Act. The new three-year funding agreement will provide the organization 800,000 a year for investigative services, an increase from 610,000. We appreciate the work of the Animal Protection Services of Saskatchewan in supporting a sound animal welfare system, and this fund will help ensure the resources that are needed.

Mr. Speaker, the 31.8 million agriculture research budget includes support for programs that foster the adoption of the new technologies and increased funding for Ag-West Bio and food centre and livestock forage research through the support in the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence. This funding is part of the 71.2 million that will be invested in strategic programs and the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, better known as CAP. CAP program details were announced at the end of March with the signing of the new federal-provincial framework.

Mr. Speaker, our government is making important investments targeted to the continuous sustainability and growth of the

agriculture industry. Agriculture is a major contributor to the province's economy, and this budget will help producers increase crop production, value-added processing, and agri-food exports.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 258.2 million will go toward fully funding business risk management programs including AgriStability, AgriInvest, western livestock price insurance, and crop insurance, which this year added fire insurance as coverage feature for pasture land. The 2018-19 budget also includes 3 million for irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation costs and irrigation asset transfer to irrigation districts.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan producers harvested a crop of about 35 million tonnes in 2017, the fifth consecutive year the province harvest has been more than 30 million tonnes. Saskatchewan's 27 agricultural exports were the fourth largest on record, with total sales of 13.5 billion, an increase of more than 60 per cent since 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about corrections and policing. The 2018-19 budget will provide full funding to the protection and response team, better known as PRT, launched last summer. The PRT was created in response to recommendations by the government caucus committee on crime and consists of 250 armed officers who have arrest and detention powers, including municipal police, RCMP, Ministry of Highways vehicle enforcement officers, and Ministry of Environment conservation officers.

Mr. Speaker, the budget includes 4.9 million in funding from SGI for enhancements to the rural crime strategy. This includes funding for an additional 30 police officers to phase in the province's combined traffic safety services unit. Additionally, the Ministry of Corrections and Policing is providing a continued annual funding of 1 million to address other recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the work that's been done on the protection and response team and look forward to continuing to implement the recommendations of the committee of which I was part of. Our government understands that many rural residents have very legitimate concerns about crime and safety, and more work needs to be done. We've already seen positive feedback from the initial development of the protect and response team, and we are confident that it will have a long-term strategy effect for reduction in rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, since being announced in August 2017, the PRT has made significant progress including: the launch of a dedicated safer communities and neighbourhoods in Prince Albert; the creation of intervention circles that use Saskatchewan hub framework in the Muskoday First Nation and Ochapowace First Nation; the purchase of automated licence plate recognition technology for PRT officers; the addition of three policing positions to the province's combined forces special enforcement unit in Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon to focus on guns, gangs, and drugs; reassignment of 10 RCMP positions to provide relief to detachments experiencing staff shortages; and the completion of Saskatchewan's first rural crime innovation challenge which has led to the development of an app-based tracking system to alert landowners about irregular activity related to their

property.

Mr. Speaker, the committee's recommendations also include ensuring RCMP resources and personnel are used effectively in rural areas, reviewing legislation to allow municipalities to jointly administer alternative policing programs, providing more funding for on-reserve programming and services, and other measures.

The recommendations are the result of the consultations the committee conducted beginning in November 2016. As part of these consultations, the committee toured 10 communities over 12 days and met with 58 stakeholders. Written submissions were also accepted and reviewed by the committee.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about energy and resources. The 2018-19 budget will see significant enhancements to the province's petroleum and mineral resource sectors. The Ministry of Energy and Resources' budget, 45.8 million, includes an increase of 665,000 or 1.5 per cent.

The increased funding will contribute to the following initiatives: 750,000 for a new four-year mineral development strategy, to create an incentive program to encourage mineral exploration and to increase the amount of geophysical data available. An additional one million to continue the enhancement of the integrated resource information system, better known as IRIS, 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 the government's commitment announced last year for a multi-year program to strengthen Saskatchewan's approach to pipeline regulation.

Mr. Speaker, this budget helps ensure that our energy and resource sector continue to lead the way in Saskatchewan's economic growth. With the additional funding announced, our government is on track to fulfill our commitment to enhance our oil and gas regulatory programs. The new mineral development strategy will encourage industry to conduct more exploration in Saskatchewan and will help protect important northern jobs in our current mining sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the funding for pipeline regulation enhancement programs supports the Government of Saskatchewan in working closely with the oil and gas industry to ensure the pipeline sector operates safely in Saskatchewan. These additional resources will address critical planning and IT [information technology] development needs and prep announced last year.

Mr. Speaker, in its recent 2017 survey for the mining investment, the Fraser Institute ranked Saskatchewan second out of 91 jurisdictions in the world for mining investment attractiveness. Preliminary estimates indicate that the value of Saskatchewan's mineral sales for 2017 was about 6.5 billion, up slightly from the year before, and the province remains a global leader in uranium and potash production.

Mr. Speaker, oil and gas is responsible for an estimated 15 per cent of Saskatchewan's gross domestic product, and recent numbers such as increased production, exploration, and revenue have shown clear signs of a renewed activity and growth in the industry. Saskatchewan is the second-largest producer among

Canada's provinces, accounting for an estimated 12 per cent of the nation's crude oil production.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about Government Relations. The 2018-19 budget continues to provide strong, predictable, and stable funding for municipalities. The budget provides 412.9 million for direct provincial support to municipalities, including municipal revenue sharing as well as funding for municipal infrastructure projects and other community services. Municipal revenue sharing remains on track at near-record highs. The amount is set based on 1 point of the provincial sales tax collected by government in the 2016-17 year. Mr. Speaker, since 2007 municipal revenue sharing has increased from 127 million in 2007-08 to 241 million, an 89.5 per cent increase. It will be distributed as follows: 155 million to urban municipalities, 68.1 million to rural municipalities, and 18 million to northern municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, our province continues to control spending and meet fiscal challenges. Our government's commitment to municipalities remains clear. Virtually no other area of funding has seen the overall levels of funding increase that municipalities have received through revenue sharing over the past 10 years. Our goal with this budget is to continue to provide stable and predictable revenue sharing to the municipalities while remaining committed to our fiscal plan of returning to balanced budgets by 2019-20.

I'll just move on a little bit here because of our time and talk a little bit about grants-in-lieu. Mr. Speaker, in 2017-18 budget the government made the decision to end some payments that have been made to municipalities by SaskPower and SaskEnergy, and undertake a complete review in order to find a solution that is equitable to all urban municipalities.

The following changes will come into effect 2018-19. Grants-in-lieu of property taxes: SaskPower and SaskEnergy will pay grants-in-lieu of property taxes on owned real estate assets in Saskatchewan but exclude generation, transmission, and distribution facilities as well as pipelines and land.

SaskEnergy municipal surcharge: SaskEnergy will now collect a municipal surcharge on behalf of all urban municipalities at a rate of 5 per cent. This charge will appear on the SaskEnergy customer bills. Municipalities can choose to opt out of this program. Prior to this year, 109 Saskatchewan urban municipalities received the municipal surcharge while most municipalities were not eligible to receive it. This change ensures fairness for all cities, towns, and villages, including resort villages, in Saskatchewan. The SaskPower municipal surcharge: Mr. Speaker, there will be no change to the existing surcharge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I would like to just briefly talk about assessment, my favourite topic. And, you know, the member from P.A. [Prince Albert] Northcote constantly brings it up that the government has raised property taxes. Well that's really not how it works. The Saskatchewan system of assessment uses the mass appraisal methodology so that assessments are done according to the fairest, most defensible system available. Mass appraisal means valuing a group of properties as of a given date using the standard methods and statistical analysis. This includes developing valuation models

capable of valuing all properties.

In addition to it determining mill rates, local governments have the authority to apply a series of tax tools such as mill rate factors by local property classes, minimum tax, and base tax. Cities also have the ability to create additional tax subclasses to apply mill rate factors. As well, cities can phase in tax changes due to revaluation. These tax tools further impact the specific tax bill received by the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, this system was introduced in 1997, and that's when the NDP were in government. We still use the same system today. It's been revamped a little bit in 2001, a little bit in 2005, and after every re-evaluation there's always some tweaking of the system that have to go.

Now the NDP talked about cleaning up the education property tax. In 2008 in the municipality that I live in, the school division mill rate was 22.5 mills. Our government implemented the largest property tax cut in the province's history, reducing EPT [education property tax] by 124 million in 2009. Since 2008-09, our government has reduced the cumulative education property tax burden on residents by over \$2.3 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the mill rates for EPT are the same as last year. Residential is at 4.12, commercial at 6.27, resource at 9.68. And I was hoping that the member would have been here so that she could get that, but I guess she can pull it off of *Hansard* tomorrow and maybe she'll have a little clearing of understanding on that. She could also go to the SAMA website and it explains it very well there, Mr. Speaker.

[22:15]

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight some of the highway improvements for Cut Knife-Turtleford constituency. Two sets of passing lanes from North Battleford to Cochin will be built, along with 30 kilometres of resurfacing of the same area. Highway 26 will see approximately 38 kilometres of resurfacing. Mr. Speaker, these two areas have seen significant traffic increases. With SAGD [steam-assisted gravity drainage] plants being built and foreign production, truck traffic has increased drastically on Highway 26, along with grain and OSB [oriented strand board] traffic on Highway 4 north of The Battlefords. With 2,600 properties on Jackfish and Murray Lake, these two highways are extremely busy.

Mr. Speaker, we were 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 property tax remain the same. And of course, Mr. Speaker, this budget contains no carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure taxes stay low as possible and that we are able to maintain and enhance important government services, our government continues to make every effort to control spending. Controlling compensation costs, the largest single budgetary expense for government, is key to keeping Saskatchewan's fiscal plan on track. Mr. Speaker, employees and unions understand the fiscal environment and continue to bargain in good faith.

Beyond negotiated settlements, we have set a goal of 70 million

in savings over two years — 35 million in this budget, and another 35 next. These savings, Mr. Speaker, we'll accomplish largely through efficiency initiatives and attrition, as part of our government's commitment to return to balance in 2019-20.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this year's budget keeps Saskatchewan on track by controlling spending, delivering high-quality programs and services for Saskatchewan people, investing in infrastructure, keeping our economy strong, and returning to balance in 2019-20. Mr. Speaker, this budget sets the stage for a new decade of growth by keeping Saskatchewan's finances and our economy on track.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the motion and not the amendment. And I move that we now adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: — The member from Cut Knife-Turtleford has moved to adjourn debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Harrison: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: — It has been moved that this House adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:19.]

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