



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

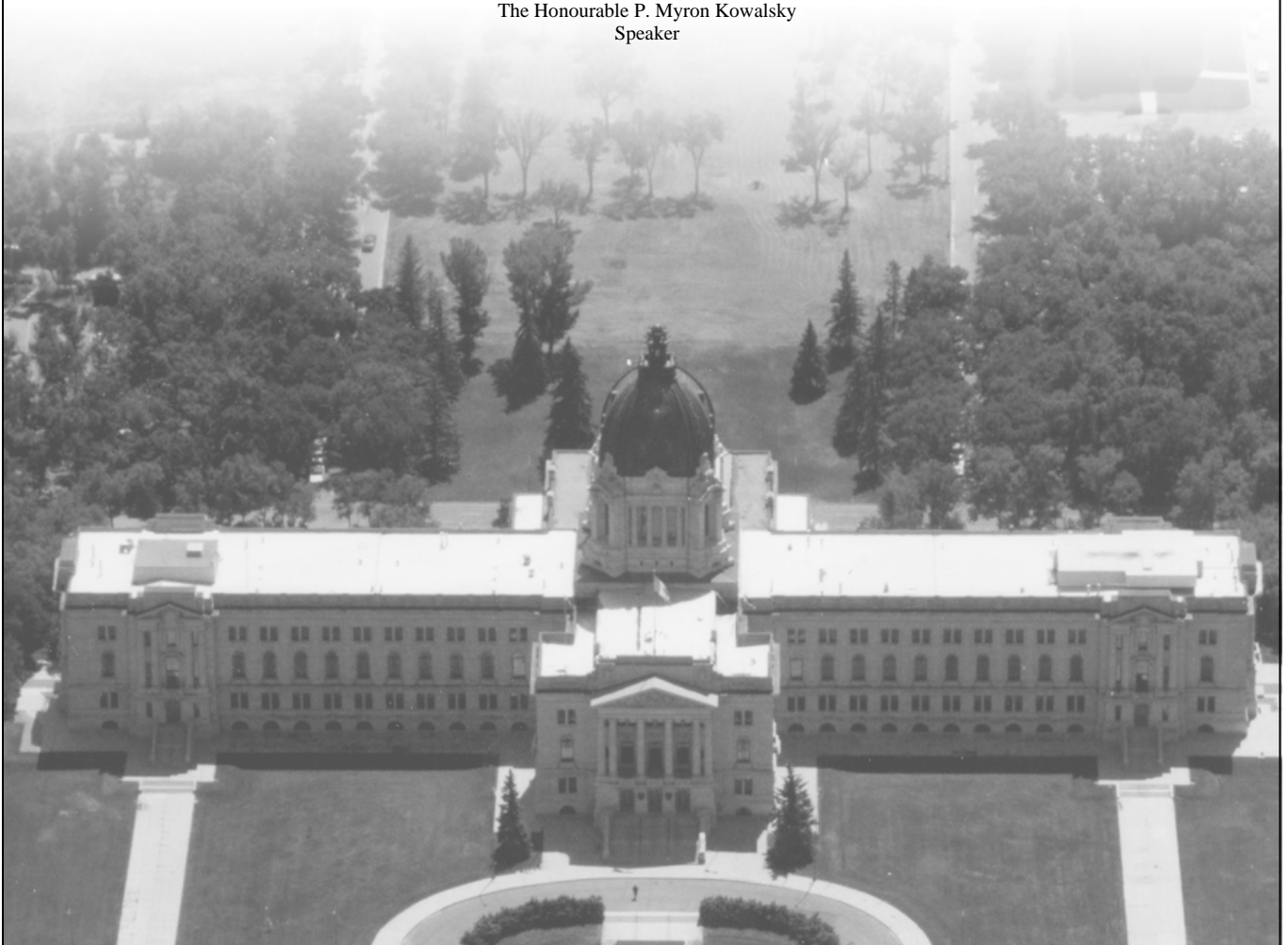
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Speaker — Hon. P. Myron Kowalsky
Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert
Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Addley, Hon. Graham	NDP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Hon. Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Beatty, Hon. Joan	NDP	Cumberland
Belanger, Hon. Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornrud, Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Borgerson, Lon	NDP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Calvert, Hon. Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
Cline, Hon. Eric	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Crofford, Joanne	NDP	Regina Rosemont
D'Autremont, Dan	SP	Cannington
Dearborn, Jason	SP	Kindersley
Draude, June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, Hon. David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Gantefoer, Rod	SP	Melfort
Hagel, Hon. Glenn	NDP	Moose Jaw North
Hamilton, Doreen	NDP	Regina Wascana Plains
Harpauer, Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Nancy	SP	Martensville
Hermanson, Elwin	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Higgins, Hon. Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kerpan, Allan	SP	Carrot River Valley
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Kowalsky, Hon. P. Myron	NDP	Prince Albert Carlton
Krawetz, Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
Lautermilch, Hon. Eldon	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
McCall, Hon. Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMorris, Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Merriman, Ted	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Prebble, Peter	NDP	Saskatoon Greystone
Quennell, Hon. Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Serby, Hon. Clay	NDP	Yorkton
Sonntag, Hon. Maynard	NDP	Meadow Lake
Stewart, Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Hon. Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Thomson, Hon. Andrew	NDP	Regina South
Toth, Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Hon. Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wakefield, Milton	SP	Lloydminster
Wall, Brad	SP	Swift Current
Wartman, Hon. Mark	NDP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Cypress Hills.

Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again today to present several pages of petitions by constituents of Cypress Hills concerned about the impending closure of the SaskPower office in the community of Shaunavon. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to keep the SaskPower office in Shaunavon open to provide full service to the community and surrounding areas.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, today's petition is signed by individuals from the communities of Shaunavon, Climax, and Frontier, as well as Bracken. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I too have a petition to maintain full service of a SaskPower office, this one being the SaskPower office in Rosetown. Mr. Speaker, the signatures on this petition note that the Rosetown SaskPower office currently supplies personal service for SaskEnergy and SaskTel customers, making it a one-stop office for payments of all three Crown utilities. The prayer of the petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to keep the SaskPower office in Rosetown open to provide full service to the community and the surrounding areas.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of signatures on this petition and they come from the communities of Rosetown, Lintlaw, Herschel, and Zealandia. And I'm pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Thunder Creek.

Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by citizens concerned with the incredible practice of transferring patients from one ambulance to another on the highway. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon.

Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to cease the transfer of patients from one ambulance to another while en route.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by individuals all from the community of Chaplin. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet again today I have several pages of a petition of citizens that are concerned of the safety of Highway No. 5. And the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary action to upgrade and widen Highway No. 5 from Humboldt to Saskatoon.

And the signatures, Mr. Speaker, are from Middle Lake, Clavet, Colonsay, Saskatoon, Humboldt, Tisdale, Quill Lake, and Meacham. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present petitions against the closure of Biggar's rural service centre and Environment office. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to reverse the decision to close the rural service centre and Environment office in Biggar.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

I have, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of signatures from the good citizens of Biggar and district. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I rise with a petition from citizens that are very, very concerned about the lab in Lafleche and District Health Centre and the undue hardships it could cause residents if it should close. And the petition reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary actions to ensure that lab services are continued at the Lafleche and District Health Centre.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by the good citizens of Lafleche. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to upgrade Highway 20 to primary weight status:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that Highway 20 be upgraded to primary weight status to ensure the economic viability in the surrounding areas.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This particular petition is signed by the good citizens from Earl Grey, Craven, Regina, Strasbourg, and Bulyea. I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Southeast.

Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise in the House today to present a petition calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to maintain the Department of Highways section shop in Watrous. The prayer says:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Department of Highways section shop in Watrous, Saskatchewan remain open so as to ensure the safety of all motorists and Saskatchewan Highways employees who would be affected by such possible closure.

And as in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by citizens from Watrous, Regina, and Saskatoon. I so present on their behalf. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — According to order the petitions received at the last sitting have been reviewed and pursuant to rule 15(7) are hereby read and received.

NOTICES OF MOTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Property Management: in the last fiscal year has the government aircraft been chartered out to individuals not employed by the government for non-government business? If so, how many times and at what cost?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Martensville.

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Finance: was a portion of the \$5 million green initiative announcement from March 21, 2007 carried forward into the 2007-2008 budget? If so, what portion of this initiative is carried forward?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for Finance: is the government considering taxation on any renewable energy production such as geothermal, wind, or hydro energy production?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Indian Head-Milestone.

Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of questions. The first one is, I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Health: has the department signed a contract with Muskeg Lake First Nations for establishing a diabetes centre of excellence? And if so what are the terms of that contract?

I also give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following questions:

To the Minister of Health: what are the outstanding capital projects to date? And what is the time frame and cost for completion?

I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: what is the department's budget allocation over the next four years for completing capital projects that are currently under way?

And my final question, Mr. Speaker, is I shall give notice on day no. 41 to ask the government the following question:

To the Minister of Health: does the department have blueprints for an integrated health science building in Saskatoon? And if not, when does the department anticipate them being ready?

I so present.

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: how many harassment-related complaints were filed in the year 2000?

And I have the same question for the years through to 2006.

In addition I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: of the harassment complaints filed in 2000, how many were verified?

And again there are the same questions for each year through to 2006.

I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: how many company employees were charged with harassment in the year 2000?

And the same question for the years right through to 2006.

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: how many company employee harassment cases resulted in convictions, disciplinary actions, or firings in the year 2000?

And again the same question for each year through to the year 2006.

And finally I give notice that I shall on day no. 41 ask the government the following question:

To the Minister Responsible for SaskPower: how much money was paid out as a result of firings related to employee harassment in the year 2000?

And the same question for each year through to the year 2006.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current.

Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today in your gallery are several members of our caucus' extended family that it's an honour for me to introduce to you and through you to members here today.

I would like to introduce to you Mr. James Chalmers of Winnipeg and his wife, Leona. They are the in-laws of our director of communications, Ian Hanna, and they are visiting here from Manitoba. Ian has wanted for some reason for me to state for the public record that he very much loves both his mother-in-law and his father-in-law. I'm not sure what issues he's having to deal with, but he wanted me to put that on the record. But I do that happily today and ask all members to join me in welcoming our guests from Manitoba to this Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Nutana, the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the House, 21 public servants that are seated in your gallery. They represent the Department of Community Resources, Department of the Environment, Government Relations, Health, Highways, and Industry and Resources.

Mr. Speaker, these public servants provide important services to the people of our province, and they also do important public policy work. Mr. Speaker, they are here to look at the behind-the-scenes look at the inner workings of the legislature. I'd like to ask all members of the Assembly to join me in welcoming these guests.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[13:45]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Melfort.

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join with the minister in welcoming the 21 public servants to the Chamber today. They're part of the parliamentary program for public servants that the legislature sponsors on a number of occasions, and I think it's a very worthwhile and important process that goes on.

You know we in this Assembly labour under the false illusion that we really are the heart and soul of what makes this province work. I'm here to tell you that we're not, that public servants in this province are what makes this province work. And I would like to join with the minister in welcoming them. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — Order please. The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Fairview.

Assessing the Budget

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, I couldn't believe what the Saskatchewan Party's Finance critic had to say in his response to the budget. Right here in this very Chamber he said that this budget was, quote, "the worst budget in 25 years." There's been some bad budgets in the last 25 years, Mr. Speaker, but this budget is not one of them.

Let's look back at the budgets from when that member was a young Tory working to get Grant Devine re-elected, Mr. Speaker. The 1985 budget had a deficit of \$578 million. The 1986 budget had a deficit of \$1.2 billion. The 1987 budget with a deficit of \$500 million. The 1991 budget had a deficit of \$842 million.

Those were deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker. Those were budgets that drove this province into a state of bankruptcy. Those were budgets that drove our credit ratings into the basement. Those were the budgets. Those were the legacy of Grant Devine and his lackeys across the way.

What does the Bank of Montreal have to say about this budget, Mr. Speaker? The government's budget, I quote, "The Province of Saskatchewan is projecting its 14th consecutive balanced budget for 2007 . . ."

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Every year the Sask Party claims that they have a deficit, but every year the banks say that we are running a surplus. Every year the credit agencies give us credit rating upgrades, and every year the debt keeps getting lower.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the budget, it's the Saskatchewan Party that has a deficit, a credibility . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time is up.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Batoche.

Election Excitement

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today you get a two-for-one deal. First I would like to tell you about the Saskatoon Eastview supper I attended on the evening of March 21. With a crowd of over 250 people there was a buzz in the air. People were excited and wanted to work for the next election to assure a win for the Saskatchewan Party. Good luck and job well done by Terry Alm and his crew in Saskatoon Eastview.

Mr. Speaker, the second instalment is an item I bring forward in the two-for-one deal is that Saturday evening in your home city of P.A. [Prince Albert], the Saskatchewan Party held a leader's dinner at the Art Hauser Centre. Mr. Speaker, the place was packed. We had to set up extra tables. We will need a bigger venue for next year. Well over 400 people attended and the mood was electrifying. After a fine meal and outstanding speech by the member for Swift Current, the Leader of the Sask Party, the word was, bring it on; let's have an election.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members to join me in congratulating both these communities on a job well done, and let's call an election.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Dewdney.

A Sustainable Budget

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, is the budget the government brought down in this Assembly last week sustainable? The simple answer is yes. Sustainability . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. This is members' statements. It's not the chorus shall sing. Member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — The simple answer is yes, Mr. Speaker.

Sustainability is predicted on operating costs not outstripping revenue growth, Mr. Speaker. It's all there in the budget documents.

The opposition says the budget isn't sustainable. But I don't think they actually have gone through the whole budget, so I'm going to make things easy for them, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to quote a third party that is trusted to understand things like debt, financing, accounting, and numbers. I'm going to quote a chartered bank, Mr. Speaker. The chartered bank said, "Program spending will grow by a lean 1.4%." That comes from the CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce], Mr. Speaker. That sounds pretty sustainable to me.

The reason for expenditures being up but program spending increases being low is stated in the budget on page 73:

The 2007-08 Budget provides funding for our largest ever . . . capital program — \$534.8 million — for improvements to roads and highways, schools, hospitals and other infrastructure. The Government continues to commit to supporting and improving community infrastructure to improve the quality of life for Saskatchewan families.

That huge capital budget is mostly for one-time projects. That means they are not ongoing costs, Mr. Speaker. That means this budget is sustainable. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Rosetown Business Awards

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to bring to the attention of this Assembly the fifth annual Rosetown and District Chamber of Commerce business awards.

At a March 7 dinner the chamber presented awards in four categories highlighting the achievements of business, employees, high school employees, and Event of the Year.

The Business of the Year award was presented to Nickells and Diamonds, which is owned and operated by Jack and Brenda Hamilton. Nickells and Diamonds is dedicated to providing first-class customer service. And like so many small businesses throughout Saskatchewan, Nickells and Diamonds is also an active member in the community.

Rosetown's Employee of the Year is May Wirth, the manager of the local Subway. Wirth is known for the kindness, courtesy, and respect she shows towards her customers and for the unwavering fairness in which she treats her co-workers.

The High School Employee of the Year — and this is my favourite award — it went to grade 12 student Jessica Gilkinson. Jessica is described as a front-end superstar who is an extremely valuable employee and volunteer. She is being recognized for the great effort she makes for her customers at the Wheatland Regional Centre.

New to the awards this year is the event category. This year's winner was the Rosetown Antique Tractor and Engine Club International Truck Show. The club is only a year old and is still quite small but is already making a big impact on Rosetown.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon this Assembly to join me in congratulating the winners and nominees of the Rosetown Chamber of Commerce business awards and thank them for doing their part to contribute to this great province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Coronation Park.

Post-budget Commentaries

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a tactic in the right wing political playbook based on the idea that if you say something loud and often enough, no matter how untrue it is, people will begin to believe it.

The Sask Party has not only adopted this tactic as a cornerstone of their political strategy, it's also the foundation of their so-called code of ethics. The Sask Party knows people don't really trust them so they adopted a phony code of ethics in the hope of convincing people they actually have some. How ironic is that?

The same principle was at play last Thursday when the member for Silver Springs misrepresented Saskatchewan's 14th consecutive balanced budget as an unsustainable \$700 million deficit budget. Compare that with Michael Gregory of BMO Capital Markets and he says — according to Mr. Gregory — when it comes to financial management, Saskatchewan is at the top of its class. He says about Saskatchewan's NDP [New Democratic Party] government budget, quote:

If someone says . . . [they're] doing a good job? Well . . . name me one other jurisdiction anywhere that you can think of that can point to fourteen balanced budgets in a row?

Mr. Speaker, unlike the Sask Party, the good people at the Bank of Montreal have no political agenda in Saskatchewan. They're not trying to get their hands on the public purse. As for the Sask Party, all they want is to get their hands on the public purse, so I don't think we can take their word to the bank.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to talk about the document released by the Finance minister last week, NDP deficit 2007. Spending is up by 9 per cent, but revenues are only forecast to grow by 1.8 per cent. When spending outpaces your revenues, what do you have? A deficit.

Columnists and others had a lot to say about deficit 2007. Randy Burton said, and I quote, "It doesn't take an auditor to tell you [that] this can't go on for very long without causing a train wreck."

Murray Mandryk wrote an entire column on, quote, "Thomsonomics" and said, quote, ". . . it's hard to see anything particularly good emerge from the numbers presented by the New Democratic finance minister."

Les Cannam with Meyers Norris and Penny in Saskatoon said, and I quote, "So the net debt in fact increased this year."

The StarPhoenix editorial board said, and I quote, "Thursday's budget by the Lorne Calvert government was a giant step in the wrong direction."

The *Leader-Post* editorial board said, and I quote, "Budgets are about making hard, but responsible, choices and there's a real question mark over whether this big-spending political budget is sustainable."

Enough said, Mr. Speaker, deficit 2007 by the NDP government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on *Sesame Street* they have a little segment called, one of these things is not like the other one; one of these things just isn't the same. I'm going to read you some quotes, Mr. Speaker, and you tell me which one is not like the other ones.

Quote one: "The province of Saskatchewan is projecting its 14th consecutive balanced budget for 2007-2008 with a \$75 million surplus in the General Revenue Fund." That quote came from the Bank of Montreal, Mr. Speaker.

Quote number two: "The province's revenue forecasts for Fiscal Year 2008 may prove conservative." That was a quote from Scotiabank, Mr. Speaker. And oh, by the way, they know we have a surplus as well.

Quote number three: "Program spending will grow by a lean 1.4%." That was the CIBC bank sounding like this budget is pretty sustainable to me. Oh, and yes, they know we have a surplus as well.

And my last quote in this little game, Mr. Speaker, is quote number four: "This budget . . . [that] we heard delivered this morning, is a \$701 million deficit." That quote is from the Sask Party Finance critic.

Mr. Speaker, can you figure out which quote just doesn't belong? Mr. Speaker, when it comes to *Sesame Street*, the Sask Party Finance critic needs to act a little more like The Count and less like Oscar the Grouch.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current.

Consequences of Budgetary Policies

Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, Saskatchewan people were in shock to learn just how badly this NDP government has mismanaged the finances of the province, how badly they have blown the boom, Mr. Speaker. They went from a \$158 million surplus last year to a \$701 million deficit this year, Mr. Speaker. They drained 500 million, a half a billion dollars, from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. And what's worse, Mr. Speaker, is there apparently is no plan in terms of how we're going to turn that around or sustain this deficit budget.

Mr. Speaker, the question to the Premier is this: how at this time, at this juncture in the history of the province, when we need fiscal probity and a growth agenda for Saskatchewan, how could he have brought in a \$700 million deficit budget?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well I know it doesn't fit into the partisan agenda of the member opposite who is of course a graduate of the Grant Devine school of economics. But let me tell you this, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you this, Mr. Speaker. The bankers that understand the province's finances better than just about anybody else have given this budget a passing grade, and they have said very clearly, very clearly that the money that has been outlined is portrayed as a \$75 million surplus, that we're handling our budget appropriately, that we are continuing to pay down debt.

[14:00]

I found it very interesting that last year the chicken-not-so-little party on the opposite side was standing up and saying \$288 million in new debt was going to be built up. Debt actually went down. This year the member from Wood River says, debt's going to go up. Debt will go down. Let's just follow the debt line, and you'll see this NDP government's paid off a billion dollars worth of debt. We've cut taxes for ordinary Saskatchewan families, and we have made health care even better. That's what an NDP government does, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister can't keep his story straight even because he told Don Newman and CBC Newsworld that indeed this was a deficit budget. That's what he said last week.

What do other people have to say, Mr. Speaker? The editorial board of *The StarPhoenix* says quote, "... a giant step in the wrong direction." The *Leader-Post* editorial board says quote,

"... there's a real question mark whether this big-spending political budget is sustainable."

Columnist Randy Burton says quote, "... this can't go on for very long without causing a train wreck." The construction association says it's a poison-pill budget. And the chartered accountants of the province of Saskatchewan — who I think people are going to believe over that minister — said, "This is a deficit budget..." The question only is the size of the deficit. The chamber of commerce says, it's not sustainable model for the long term. And the taxpayers federation says the budget is unsustainable in the long term.

There's a pattern emerging here. This government has introduced a deficit budget that everyone in the province understands is unsustainable. Why have they done that, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — What the right wing columnists say is one thing, but let me tell you what the bankers are saying, Mr. Speaker. Let me read to you what they are saying. They're saying:

The province is projecting its 14th consecutive balanced budget. On balance, the province continues to earn top marks for its commitment to cutting taxes, keeping spending in check, but not to the point of ignoring important outlays and maintaining a fiscal cushion.

That's the Bank of Montreal. What is it that the Scotia Bank says? They say, "The province's revenue forecasts may in fact prove to be conservative."

What is it that the CIBC bank says? They say, "Program spending is going to grow by a lean 1.4 %."

Yes, on one side are Canada's banks that understand finances. On the other side are the fiscal experts from the Grant Devine school of economics and their political friends on the other side predicting doom and gloom, just as they've done every year. And you know what, Mr. Speaker? Just like every other year, once again, they're wrong.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, again the Minister of Finance seems to be accusing the chartered accountants of not telling the truth on budget day. The chartered accountants of this province said this is a deficit budget. The question is just the level of the deficit. Well maybe the Minister of Finance wants to disagree with those folks, accountants in Saskatchewan, on this deficit budget, but I think the people of the province know who they'll believe.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has a chance to improve his credibility. He was asked on budget day if this is

sustainable. Indeed why don't you just release the projections that you have, you've used to develop this particular budget? That was the question asked by the media. What did the Minister of Finance say to that when he had the opportunity to say sure, I'll do that? He said no, he was not going to release those, Mr. Speaker.

What is he hiding? This is the government of SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company]. This is the government of the Murdoch Carriere scandal. Again on this issue of projections, on the sustainability of this budget, what is the minister hiding? Why won't he release those projections?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, this is the NDP government that introduced The Balanced Budget Act. This is the NDP government that's introduced 14 consecutive balanced budgets. This is the NDP government that's paid down billions of dollars worth of debt built up by an administration that that member was on the payroll for. This is the NDP government that has provided for quarterly reporting, mid-year reporting. And you know what? We even go so far, unlike what that party supported, to table an annual budget.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is sustainable. We will prove that out in the following quarters as we report the finances. And the member opposite ought to think very seriously about what it is that caused him to flip-flop in terms of his position in terms of fiscal credibility.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the people of the province would beg to differ with the minister. It was the Romanow-MacKinnon government that brought fiscal probity to this province. This government has overseen massive increases in spending and now a \$700 million deficit, Mr. Speaker. That's his record. That's the Premier's record, Mr. Speaker.

This is unbelievable. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance in the government that will not provide the details on the Murdoch Carriere scandal, that presided over the SPUDCO scandal, not telling the truth for six years, is now wanting to say to the people of Saskatchewan just trust us — just trust us that we've actually done our homework, that there are projections to sustain the budget of the province of Saskatchewan. Fair enough.

If the minister has those projections, if he has those numbers, will he simply do the right thing and table them in this legislature today? What is he hiding?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, when we started this term after this NDP government was re-elected, we presented a four-year plan to Saskatchewan people in terms of the finances. It will interest the member opposite to know, and particularly the member who's yapping from Wood River, it should interest him to know we are a billion and a half dollars ahead on debt reduction from what we projected four years ago.

And I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker, when this NDP government is re-elected, we will table another four-year plan for Saskatchewan people. And we will show again that we will continue to pay down the debt. We will continue to manage the tax load. And we will continue to improve the services for Saskatchewan people.

It's very interesting to see that a party that neither produced a quarterly financial report, a mid-year financial report, or in its dying days even a budget has the nerve to stand today and lecture this NDP government that's cut taxes, improved services, and helped to pay down more than \$1 billion of debt since our last election. Shame on that opposition.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Order. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further question on deficit 2007, on June 7, 1988, here's what the Premier said about self-serving advertising. And I quote, "It's just, in my judgement, Mr. Speaker, the wrong kind of priority." Well it appears, Mr. Speaker, that priorities have shifted over there.

On the weekend we learned that this NDP government, Mr. Speaker, this NDP government is embarking on yet another advertising campaign, Mr. Speaker, spending \$350,000 of taxpayers' money on this, another advertising campaign. Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Finance: if this budget is so good, why does it need the help of a large, self-serving NDP advertising campaign paid for by public dollars?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I find it amazing that the member opposite on the weekend was quoted as saying, well I have no idea . . . He says, I have no idea what the ads are actually about but I'm opposed to them. That's what he says. That's what he says in the ads that he's immediately opposed to it. Well I guess that that's what that Saskatchewan Party's about.

What Saskatchewan people will see as we roll out the advertising campaign on radio and on TV is they'll see ads that will promote the two major initiatives in this budget that are

going to make life better for Saskatchewan people. They're going to have an opportunity to see how this budget helps young people get their future started right here in Saskatchewan by being able to earn \$20,000 tax free for each of those first five years. And they're going to have an opportunity to see in this advertising that we're making sure Saskatchewan's seniors benefit from the prosperity of this province with a cap of prescription drugs at \$15.

This is a good-news budget for Saskatchewan people. It builds on the strength of Saskatchewan's finances, and it builds on the priorities of Saskatchewan people. I'd encourage the member opposite to maybe get in tune with that.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Well, Mr. Speaker, for the minister's information the ads are already running. I haven't seen the one that features him, but I'm sure it's coming. Mr. Speaker, at least this year the Minister of Finance hopefully will spare us, have the decency not to include himself in the advertising. Last year, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister said and I quote: "I'm in . . . [the ads because] it's my budget." Remember that comment? "It's my budget." At least this minister has realized now that it's not his budget, but he's certainly spending the money like it's not his money.

Mr. Speaker, I want to see the ad that says that in fact that this is a deficit budget. I want to see the ad that talks about this budget being a \$700 million deficit. I don't think we'll see those ads. These ads won't talk about the minister's refusal to have revenue projections for next year's budget and the year following.

Mr. Speaker, why doesn't this, why doesn't this Finance minister try a little truth in advertising? Why are the people forced to pay \$350,000 to prop up this budget?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Mr. Speaker, people won't see ads like what those guys want because there's this little thing called truth in advertising.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — I am glad the member opposite was digging out some quotes because I dug out some real doozies from him from last year. Let me just start here, April 6, he says, "Now this government is sitting on a mountain of money." Then he goes and says the minister and the cabinet are sitting on a mountain of money. He says there's a mountain of money that they're sitting on, in November. Again in November he says the NDP shouldn't be building up a mountain of money. Then he says we shouldn't be building up any more money. And he says you know what, we should be spending more money.

Well I've got a . . . [inaudible] . . . here of the Sask Party demanding that we spend more money. Now that we're spending some money, they're saying, oh no, why are you spending the money? We're spending the money because we're going to make life better for Saskatchewan families. That member should stand up and support Saskatchewan people.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, last Thursday Saskatchewan people learned that the NDP government blew the boom. Mr. Speaker, they are asking, they are asking the same questions, the same questions that members on this side of the House are asking. Where is the mountain of money? What happened to it? What did members over there do with it?

Mr. Speaker, let's review the money that this Premier and this government has spent on self-serving advertising over the past six years. Let's review the list, Mr. Speaker. And it is quite a list: Future is Wide Open, \$8 million; 2004 equalization campaign, 75,000; Raise a Flag for Fairness, \$268,000; last year's raise the flag for the Finance minister, last year's budget, \$450,000; the Imagine campaign, 300,000; the exclamation mark campaign, 1.5 million, we're not even sure if that one's finished yet, now another \$350,000.

Mr. Speaker, why has this Premier spent \$10 million of taxpayers' money on wasteful advertising?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Thomson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. It talked about shifting priorities from the member opposite. I think we were all very surprised to listen to him on Friday morning explain what that party's first plans would be, God forbid, they should ever form a government.

What was the first thing they said they would cut? Health care spending. The first budget they would go to is cut to health care. Would they talk about hiring more nurses or more doctors? No. They thought the prescription for better health care is to hire accountants and auditors. Isn't that a curious position?

Then they went on to say that they think we've hired too many civil servants. There's too many civil servants in the government, says the members opposite. They're going to fire civil servants. They're going to lay off front-line staff. They're going to cut into the health care budget.

The priorities of that member opposite and of that party opposite do not match up with the priorities of Saskatchewan people — priorities that say they want lower taxes, better health care, and more jobs; priorities that this NDP government is addressing.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Management of Harassment Complaints

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, one of the victims of Murdoch Carriere's harassment has written a statement regarding a meeting that took place in 2002. According to the statement, and I quote:

We discussed our harassment with supervisors many times prior to any investigation taking place in late 2002. Most of our supervisors brought our complaints forward to higher ups in the department. Nothing was done to stop the harassment and make our workplace safe.

Why didn't the NDP government do anything to investigate the harassment complaints when they were first brought forward?

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, the way the anti-harassment policy works is that people lodge a formal complaint alleging harassment. That occurred in, I believe, September of 2002. Mr. Gillies was appointed to investigate. The person who was the alleged harasser was put on leave of absence without pay. Then he was suspended without pay, moved to Regina, demoted three levels, and red-circled, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have said to the members opposite on more than one occasion in this Assembly that, as a result of the information that became available on the front page of *The StarPhoenix*, which in essence was the content of Gillies's report, Mr. Carriere was terminated.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:15]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to carry on with the quotes from this letter. The letter also states and I do quote:

After repeated attempts to address the harassment, a meeting took place in July of 2002 between the Associate Deputy Minister [ADM] of ... Environment and five supervisors ... The supervisors were told in so many words by the ADM, "That's just Murdoch."

That's the response the NDP government with the so-called zero tolerance harassment policy gave supervisors — that's just Murdoch.

Mr. Speaker, why did this government continually ignore harassment that was taking place in that office?

The Speaker: — Order. The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said both inside and outside of the House, people who work in our province, whether they are male or female, deserve and are entitled to a respectful and harassment-free workplace and that we have a zero tolerance for any kind of harassment, whether it is sexual or otherwise, in this province, both in the private sector and in the public sector.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, when we came to government in 1991, we introduced amendments in this House to the occupational health and safety legislation to ensure that harassment was a provision of that legislation and that workers were protected against harassment, both in the private sector and the public sector.

And what did the opposition do of the day? What did the member from Cannington and Moosomin do when they were sitting in opposition then? They voted to amend to take that out of the legislation, and in fact they voted against the legislation, Mr. Speaker. That is their record on harassment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP's mishandling of the Murdoch Carriere scandal is unforgivable. But by far the most damning statement in the letter is to follow, and I want the minister to remember the statement that was just made about the policy happening in 1991.

I'm going to quote a statement that says, "Some of us were harassed by Murdoch Carriere as early as 1994." 1994, she goes on to say, and I quote, "Some of the women had to go to the RCMP before anyone in the upper echelons of government would even begin to listen to our complaints."

Mr. Speaker, why weren't these complaints taken seriously?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said to the member opposite, I have said that an official complaint was lodged in September '02. An investigator was appointed, Bob Gillies from Saskatoon. He issued a report in December '02. Mr. Carriere was immediately removed from the workplace and placed on leave of absence with pay ... or in 2002, I'm sorry.

Mr. Speaker, he was suspended without pay, and he was demoted three levels, and he was sent to Regina, and he had no supervision. Mr. Speaker, when it became information that was available to the government members, particularly the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission — we read about it on the front page of *The StarPhoenix* — he was dismissed, Mr. Speaker. He was dismissed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, the minister has repeated again that all a woman has to do is to tell her supervisor that harassment is taking place, and the complaints will be dealt with. Yet these women have told us that they were harassed as early as 1994. And when was their harassment complaints looked at? 2002, the women waited some eight years and an RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] investigation before this NDP government would even start to listen.

Will the minister undertake to investigate who knew of the prior complaints about Murdoch Carriere? And who in this NDP government swept the complaints under the rug?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, this really does speak to the credibility of the member opposite and it really does speak to the spin that the members opposite are trying to perpetuate in the province of Saskatchewan.

Let us understand. Let us understand because I know that the members opposite don't understand this. The people who are elected in this Assembly, the people who are cabinet ministers, are not involved in the day-to-day operations of the provincial public service. We set general, broad policy directives, but we are not in the workplace.

Now I know what's going on in my office, Mr. Speaker, and I know that there are members opposite that worked for the government prior to 1991, and there were all kinds of allegations that were made about what went on in the days of Grant Devine, Mr. Speaker. I want to say again to the member opposite, a formal complaint was lodged. An investigation took place. And, Mr. Speaker, he was turfed . . .

The Speaker: — Member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, it took a lot of strength and a lot of courage for the nine women involved in the Murdoch Carriere harassment case to bring the issue forward. They were harassed in the workplace, and then with the meagre settlement that they were given compared to the money given to their harasser, they're again being abused.

Mr. Speaker, if the NDP government would've acted on the harassment claims in 1994 when it was first brought to their attention, I wonder . . . We want to know how many women would've been spared the abuse that happened after those years. How many women were abused because this government did not act on the harassment case when they first learned about it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we have literally hundreds of managers that work in the public service, hundreds of managers that work in the day-to-day operations of the provincial government, Mr. Speaker. And I can say to the member opposite, workers in this province are protected in law against harassment. Whether it is ethnic harassment, whether it's racial harassment, whether it's religious harassment, or whether it's sexual harassment — they are protected in law.

And when a complaint is lodged, they are obligated, Mr. Speaker, to investigate, assign an investigator. An investigation should take place, and then appropriate action based upon whether or not the allegations are confirmed should take place, Mr. Speaker. We have no tolerance, absolutely no tolerance for harassment in the province of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Kelvington-Wadena.

Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, what I and what members on this side of the House understand is that women have a right to work in a workplace that is free from sexual harassment. That's the type of thing that we believe should be happening.

Mr. Speaker, we learned that some women waited for over eight years. They waited for an RCMP investigation. And they waited for the media to talk about this issue before this NDP government would even start to listen. So I again ask the minister: will the minister undertake to investigate who knew of these prior complaints about Murdoch Carriere and who in this NDP government swept those complaints under the rug?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, I just want to say this to the member opposite, which really is . . . it does speak to their credibility. I think anybody who works in the public service as a professional and career public service believes that they worked for the Government of Saskatchewan — not an NDP government, a Liberal government, or a Saskatchewan Party government. That's where the member opposite simply doesn't get it. People who are professional public servants work for the Government of Saskatchewan.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to again say to the members opposite . . . and it really does speak to their credibility because the member is leaving us with the impression that these women went to the RCMP before they launched their formal complaint. And my understanding is that is not at all what happened, which then again speaks to the credibility.

They said that the judge made a particular statement in a judgment. They table it in the House. There was nothing there. They said we erased the hard drive — simply not true, Mr. Speaker. And then they said that we put a gag order on the

women, and that wasn't true either.

The Speaker: — Member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — Order, please. The Chair recognizes the Minister for the Crown Investments Corporation.

Saskatchewan EnerGuide for Houses Program Extension

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to announce today that our government is enhancing and it is extending the Saskatchewan EnerGuide for Houses, a very popular program that helps homeowners save energy and money. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, the program is helping reduce Saskatchewan's greenhouse gas emissions. That's in keeping with our government's commitment to protecting the environment and building a green and a prosperous economy.

The Saskatchewan EnerGuide for Houses program began in November 2005 as part of the Saskatchewan Energy Share plan. Since then more than 6,000 homeowners have received grants for making energy-efficiency upgrades. Those upgrades have reduced Saskatchewan's greenhouse gas emissions by about 22,000 tonnes annually, roughly equally to permanently removing 5,500 cars from the roadway. On average, homeowners who have made improvements are saving about \$715 a year on energy costs, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, because this program has been so popular and so effective in saving people money and helping protect our environment, we are extending it for another four years. That program will now run until March 31, 2011. We are increasing the maximum grant from 2,000 to \$5,000 per homeowner. We are also adding to the list of improvements that can qualify for the grant, things like geothermal, solar, electrical, and water initiatives. Of special interest to many northerners is that high-efficient wood-burning heaters now qualify as part of the EnerGuide program. This will also be of interest to some recreational property owners as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations I am particularly pleased to note that this program extends to on-reserve, private, and band-owned homes. People will still need to get pre-retrofit and post-retrofit evaluations for their homes.

I'm pleased to say that our government will pay half the costs of these evaluations to a maximum of \$150 for each evaluation. The first evaluation will also tell homeowners how much of a grant they will receive from each type of improvement so they will be better able to select what they would like to do.

Mr. Speaker, we estimate that 20,000 additional Saskatchewan households can take advantage of this enhanced program over the next four years. We estimate . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Mr. Speaker, we estimate that their

average cost saving after renovations will be about \$950 a year. More importantly, their renovations could result in Saskatchewan reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 75,000 tonnes annually. That's like permanently removing close to 19,000 cars from the roadway.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to say that the government is extending indefinitely the PST [provincial sales tax] exemption on Energy Star qualified furnaces, boilers, and heat pumps. The continuation of this PST exemption and the extension and enhancement of the Saskatchewan EnerGuide for Houses program are good for Saskatchewan people and they are good for our environment. They will benefit us today and they will provide lasting benefits for future generations. Just one more reason, Mr. Speaker, why Saskatchewan is a great place to live, to work, and to raise our families. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the extension of the EnerGuide program is a good move for Saskatchewan residents hoping to save money through retrofits and it is a good move for the environment. And we're pleased to see that the NDP have now implemented yet more of the Sask Party ideas, which is to include geothermal and solar. I know a number of members on this side of the House have talked about geothermal and asked this government why they have not recognized geothermal as an energy saving method.

The Speaker: — Order, members. Order. The Chair recognizes the member for Humboldt.

Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears, Mr. Speaker, they are very sensitive when we bring up geothermal and the advantages of geothermal and how we have not had any rebate programs prior for that type of energy. However we do believe that this tired, old NDP government is doing it solely for political reasons.

[14:30]

They are desperately trying to appear to be green and environmentally friendly after being lambasted by national and provincial environmental groups for their terrible environmental record. I hope that the work that Saskatchewan residents undertake to retrofit their homes won't go to waste as our Crown corporations have to raise their rates due to less revenue.

Toronto hydro just filed a 6.3 per cent rate increase because conservation programs were so successful. Saskatchewan people should not be penalized for their efforts, so we hope that our own Crown corporations do not do the same. This program will help Saskatchewan people. But as with so many of the latest announcements by the, pre-election announcements by NDP, we do suspect that they're only announcing this for political reasons and not for environmental reasons. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 56 — The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2007

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister for Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 56, The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2007 be now introduced and read the first time.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Minister of Government Relations that Bill No. 56, The Municipalities Amendment Act, 2007, be now introduced and read for the first time. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When will the Bill be read a second time? The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Not Debatable)

Return No. 2

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Government Whip.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government, we will convert it to motions for return (debatable).

The Speaker: — Motion no. 1 has been converted to motions for return (debatable).

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Thomson that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise once again on behalf of the official opposition and the

people of Saskatchewan to continue my response to deficit 2007, the NDP's red ink election scheme.

Mr. Speaker, on Thursday I, like many people across the province, was shocked and dismayed when the Minister of Finance tabled deficit 2007 in this Assembly. In a year when the NDP's project revenues to drop slightly from the year before, the NDP government decided to ramp up spending by 9 per cent, Mr. Speaker. In a year when the size of the population of Saskatchewan continues to shrink, the NDP's response was to grow the size of government, Mr. Speaker.

The result is that the NDP have saddled people of Saskatchewan with a \$700 million deficit. They've gutted the Fiscal Stabilization Fund — yes, that rainy day fund that was supposed to be there for when it rains. And I said it before, Mr. Speaker: it may not be raining out on the economy of Saskatchewan, but it is raining for the NDP Party of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, as I stated on Thursday, that's an irresponsible and reckless budget. The 9 per cent spending increase — four times as much, five times as much as the growth in revenue — is not sustainable, Mr. Speaker. And it's a strong indication to the people of Saskatchewan just how desperate this NDP government has become.

Mr. Speaker, a good budget will sell itself. Indeed I think that's a fair comment — a good budget will go out there and sell itself. This government tried to leak the budget. They tried to get a head start on things. Well what happened, Mr. Speaker? When the budget came, where was the wow factor? Where was the wow factor? I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, it was a thud. We had the thud factor here with this budget. The two little leaks that came out, I'm interested to hear how the Finance minister's investigation is coming. We will be interested to hear exactly what he has to say on that.

Mr. Speaker, yet on Friday we learned that this NDP government doesn't have the confidence in deficit 2007. They don't have the confidence to go out and sell this budget themselves. Instead they're embarking on another in a long string of advertising campaigns. The red ink is dripping from this budget, Mr. Speaker, and now they're going to spend \$350,000 of people's money on an advertising campaign to try to convince people of Saskatchewan.

Well what's different about this advertising campaign than the \$8 million in Future is Wide Open? The Imagine campaign, remember that one, Mr. Speaker? The Imagine campaign, \$300,000, taxpayers' dollars, thrown out the window, and I'm not sure we got any bang for our buck there whatsoever. But what we did get, Mr. Speaker, is an exclamation mark, the most expensive punctuation in the history of Saskatchewan — \$1.5 million for an exclamation mark.

And we don't even know if that one's finished yet, but they've already embarked on a new one. At least it's a little less than the raise a flag for the Finance minister, last year's campaign, which cost \$450,000. We can only speculate on what cost the extra \$100,000 last year. But we know that the minister was involved in that campaign, and we can only speculate on what the added cost was for. It's another campaign in a long line of

campaigns designed to distract Saskatchewan people from the dismal record of this NDP government.

What's different about this advertising campaign, Mr. Speaker? It's the absence of the Finance minister. You'll remember that the minister was front and centre in the ad campaign last year. And yet this year's campaign, \$350,000 to sell deficit 2000, we hear, we hear that the Finance minister will not appear. We haven't seen all the commercials yet, but I did see a couple of them on the weekend. Mr. Speaker, and it's a wonder, given the reviews and the media commentary of deficit 2007 has received, it's no wonder why this government has to go and spend \$350,000 of taxpayers' money.

But let's review what people across the province are saying. Let's review what the columnists are saying. Let's review what the people who are phoning in to talk shows across the province have to say about deficit 2007.

Mr. Speaker, Randy Burton of the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* — I don't know if he's one of those right wing columnists that the Minister of Finance was talking about. I don't know. He seems pretty balanced to me, Mr. Speaker. But here's what he had to say, and I quote: "It doesn't take an auditor to tell you this can't go on . . . very long without causing a train wreck," Mr. Speaker. A train wreck. That's what this government is being compared to, not only by members on this side of the House — although I may have said that myself sometime — but from columnists across Saskatchewan, across Saskatchewan. And the minister from North Battleford agrees that indeed that this is a train wreck just waiting to happen in this NDP government.

Let's quote somebody who's familiar to members in this House — Mr. Murray Mandryk of the *Leader-Post*. He attends most sessions and usually has something to say about the goings-on in this Chamber. And let me quote Mr. Murray Mandryk, Mr. Speaker:

The numbers that really matter [and I quote] are the \$8.35 billion in spending [and] the \$7.87 billion in revenue, the \$701 million 2007-08 deficit once all government operations including the Crowns are calculated, and . . . [increases] . . . Saskatchewan's debt to \$11.4 billion [Mr. Speaker].

These are the numbers that apply to the real world of whether or not we can afford this budget.

Mr. Mandryk goes on to say:

Sadly, the numbers in . . . [this] brave new world of Thomsonomics — where you can increase spending by nine per cent when revenues are only increasing by 1.8 per cent and still claim a surplus — [they] are a bit scary.

In fact, it's hard to see anything particularly good emerge from the numbers presented by the . . . [New Democratic] finance minister.

There it is, Mr. Speaker. There it is in print for everyone to read, that it's hard to see anything particularly good emerge from the numbers that are presented by the NDP Finance minister on Thursday. Regardless of all the leaks, regardless of

all the spin, regardless of all the money that will be spent trying to prop up this failing budget, taxpayers' money, there is hardly anything good to emerge from the numbers presented by the New Democratic Finance minister.

That's the sad reality, Mr. Speaker. That's what we're faced with today. That's what people are asking themselves when they look at this budget in context of their own finances and say, I could never afford to run my own finances the way that this NDP government is just drowning in red ink.

Mr. Speaker, here's what else was said about the NDP's deficit 2007. Bruce Johnstone, business columnist for the *Regina Leader-Post*, said, and I quote, "In the aftermath of yesterday's budget, the question remains: Is the NDP's budget . . . sustainable?" And he went on to say:

Business and taxpayers groups, construction companies and retailers, even chartered accountants, all expressed concern about the "sustainability" of the NDP . . . fiscal plan.

They decried the nine-per-cent increase in spending as "unsustainable," and condemned the \$510 million reckless withdrawal from the . . . [Fiscal Stabilization Fund] — the province's "rainy day" fund . . . "reckless and irresponsible."

End quote, Mr. Speaker. The rainy day fund, the Fiscal Stabilization Fund that we heard of year and year . . . over and over again and over and over again in this legislature from members opposite, that it's going to be for a rainy day, Mr. Speaker. Well again, it's not raining on the economy of Saskatchewan. The economy of Saskatchewan should be booming. Oil production should be up by more than a meagre 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker. But instead we have the raining fortunes of the NDP party opposite.

We saw that in the Weyburn-Big Muddy by-election. We saw that in spades, Mr. Speaker, in the Martensville by-election, that indeed it is raining on the NDP these days. But that's no reason to go and drain the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Mr. Speaker.

Let me be more specific about some of the comments that were referred to by the media, Mr. Speaker, because when it comes to judging the sustainability of the NDP's deficit budget, I'll take the word of the accountants, of the political columnists, of the business people. I'll take that word over that of the Finance minister any day because trying to sell a budget as a balanced budget is just not going to work when the \$700 million in red ink is staring you in the face.

Mr. Speaker, what did Ralph Boychuk from the chamber of commerce have to say in the rotunda on budget day? He said that the NDP's budget is not sustainable, and I quote, ". . . it's a 9% spending increase and a deficit budget that is certainly not a sustainable model for [the] long-term. So yeah [I have] a big concern." That's Ralph Boychuk and that's what he had to say from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Speaker, another name that's familiar to this House, Michael Fougere of the Saskatchewan Construction Association . . . and he's a member of Regina City Council as well. What

did he have to say about this budget? Mr. Speaker, and I quote: “We have a 9% increase in spending. That is simply not sustainable.” A theme that we hear time and time again, that we’ve heard it a lot on Thursday, and I’m sure we’re going to hear a lot more about it.

Mr. Fougere goes on to say:

We have a deficit budget and our debt is growing. This is in my mind a poison pill budget, it’s not a good budget because of the spending. We have prosperity in the province.

We should be growing and we should be reaping better benefits from this. I just don’t know if we can sustain this kind of spending.

Mr. Speaker, even the chartered accountants association of Saskatchewan calls this budget a deficit. And I know this Finance minister and other Finance ministers have quoted the Institute of Chartered Accountants. They do great work in the province and what they have to say is taken very seriously, and it should be. Well what do they have to say this year: that this an unsustainable budget, Mr. Speaker. Unsustainable and indeed, indeed they go ahead and confirm that it’s a \$700 million deficit in this province. We’re back to deficit financing.

Nola Joorisity of the chartered accountants association said, and I quote, I’ll give you the direct quote:

Well it is a deficit budget and the size of the deficit depends on what you include. If you look at just the general revenue fund which is where our taxes go into, it’s about \$480 million deficit.

If you include the Crown corporations and things like the Auto Fund and Workers’ Compensation, you’re up at \$700 million.

Mr. Speaker, let’s forget the shell game that the NDP would like to play here and try to be fast with the numbers. They call it the Thomsonomics; I think that’s what one of the newspaper columnists had to say. Let’s forget about that, and let’s just focus on what the auditor says should be the real report card of a budget. He said you have to look at the budget on a summary financial basis, and there it is in black and white for all to see, \$700 million deficit, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and probably the most damning comment about this year’s deficit budget came from — and it might surprise you — but the most damning comment about this budget, came from the Finance minister himself. Did this comment come in this legislature? No, Mr. Speaker. Did it come out in the rotunda when he was asked by reporters? No, Mr. Speaker. It came out when he was doing an interview with CBC’s [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] Don Newman.

[14:45]

Mr. Newman was in Ontario, and the Finance minister thought he was safe in being a little more forthcoming with his answer. When asked by the CBC whether he was going to spend more money in the fiscal year than the province was going to collect,

the Finance minister responded — and I hope all members of this House are listening, especially members on the other side — the Finance minister responded, when asked when he was going to spend more money than collect, “yes that’s right.”

Mr. Speaker, and when Mr. Newman asked . . . and here’s the interesting quote, Mr. Speaker. When Mr. Newman asked, “and that’s not called a deficit in Saskatchewan?” The Finance minister responded, “well” and I quote: “well it’s actually a surplus on the GRF, but on a summary financial basis, it’s a deficit.”

There it is, Mr. Speaker, there it is on the record. There it was for everyone in the nation to hear and to see. He couldn’t answer that in this House. He couldn’t give that answer to the reporters outside in the rotunda. We did numerous interviews. Not once did he say that, it had to happen on national news, on CBC with Mr. Newman. Well, Mr. Speaker, there it is, the most damning comment. And there was many, many damning comments from everybody across Saskatchewan, but the most damning comment about deficit 2007 came from the Finance minister himself.

Mr. Speaker, even the Finance minister admits it’s a deficit. He tells the people of Saskatchewan one thing. And then when he thinks he’s in the safety of an out-of-province interview, he says another thing. It’s a budget that spends more than the province has taken in, and clearly, clearly the two words that have been attributed to this budget more than any — more than reckless and irresponsible even — are that it’s not sustainable, Mr. Speaker, not sustainable, not sustainable in the short term, not sustainable, certainly not sustainable in the long term, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if the spending in this budget was sustainable in the future as the NDP claimed, why won’t they show the public the revenue forecast in the coming year? I think people were surprised across the province — and those that take an interest in the budgets — when they looked through this budget document and found that there are no revenue projections beyond this year. Well a minister said, well it’s not our responsibility to do that. Darn right it’s his responsibility to do that. Darn right it’s his responsibility to do that. A good budget would have those projections in there, and we see this budget just devoid of any projections.

What are they trying to hide, Mr. Speaker? What are they trying to cover up? Where is the information? It was suggested maybe the projections are in the same file as the Murdoch Carriere information. I don’t know. But I wish the NDP would find that file and provide that information for Saskatchewan people. We need to see that information.

The minister has admitted that he has these projections, but he won’t share them publicly, Mr. Speaker; instead he asks us to trust him. Yes this, the NDP Party of SPUDCO and numerous boondoggles along the way, they’re asking us — they’re asking the people of Saskatchewan once again — to trust them.

I don’t have to remind people in Saskatchewan that right after the last provincial election . . . which contained no hint of tax increases, and the former Finance minister said an election campaign wasn’t a time to talk about tax increases. But the

NDP, what did they do once they got back into power? You know, they squeaked back in, but what did they do, Mr. Speaker? What was the first thing of a financial basis that the NDP government did? They hiked the PST. They accepted the Boughen report — a lot of good work was done on the Boughen report. They read half of it. They increased the PST.

And where is the long-term property tax break for Saskatchewan people? It wasn't anywhere to be found, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: — Forgot about that.

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Yes. They hiked the PST, then they put the Boughen report on the shelf, let it collect a little bit of dust, and here we are today. This is the situation that we have here. That's what people got the last time they trusted this NDP government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to you that it's not going to happen again. If the indication that I got over the weekend from the many people who I talked to and the many programs that I listened to, the many talk shows that I was on where people phone in, people of Saskatchewan will see right through this, and they will not be fooled again by this NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Cheveldayoff: — They know that deficit 2007 is unsustainable, reckless, and irresponsible.

The evidence is in, Mr. Speaker. The public reaction is in. In a poll on CJME, only 10.5 of respondents gave the budget top marks; 57.1 said that it failed miserably, Mr. Speaker. Those marks are even worse than my marks in high school, Mr. Speaker. No, they're a lot worse than that. But 10.5 per cent of them.

Mr. Speaker, a reader's poll on the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* website asked the question, do you feel the NDP budget is good for Saskatchewan? And that takes the numbers out of it. That just asks the basic question that people in Saskatchewan are asking, is this budget good for me and my family and for anyone in Saskatchewan that wants to make Saskatchewan a place where they raise their family and where they embark upon their careers? Well, Mr. Speaker, to that very, very direct question — do you feel the NDP budget is good for Saskatchewan? — the response, almost 70 per cent of respondents said no, this budget is not good for Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I don't want to take up all the time in the legislature this afternoon. But I will say that every poll that you've looked at, every poll that people have seen where Saskatchewan people had a chance to speak . . . Because of course this NDP government won't call an election and let Saskatchewan people speak, so that's the only means that they have a way of doing it, is through polling like that.

John Gormley on his "Reality Check," 80 per cent of Saskatchewan people listening to John Gormley's show who phoned in said that this budget is a failure — 80 per cent, Mr. Speaker. These are people from across Saskatchewan. These are

people that called in from Regina and from Saskatoon and from North Battleford and from Yorkton and from Meadow Lake and from Saskatchewan Rivers. That's what people had to say. Eighty per cent of the people said this budget just is off the mark; it doesn't do anything to help Saskatchewan. And above all it's a deficit of \$700 million, Mr. Speaker. Shame.

The people of Saskatchewan don't think it's good for the province. Stakeholders question the sustainability. And now even the Finance minister acknowledges on national television that it is indeed a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close today by quoting an editorial in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* — my hometown, my local newspaper that I read every day — and the paper's reaction to deficit 2007, Mr. Speaker. And I quote:

Any time a government that expects its revenues to rise by less than two per cent [and] goes on a pre-election binge that hikes spending by nine per cent, then says its actions are sustainable for the long term, it's time to worry.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the sentiment of the article. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed time to worry. The editorial goes on to state, and I quote, "Thursday's budget by the Lorne Calvert government was a giant step in the wrong direction [Mr. Speaker]." And another quote:

Finance Minister Andrew Thomson's claim of delivering yet another "balanced budget" stands in stark contrast to the reality that the province's books are expected to wind up in the red by an astounding \$701 million. Even though the province's 2007-08 revenues are projected to be a whopping \$7.87 billion, spending will grow to \$8.35 billion by year's end after [substantial] debt payments are counted [Mr. Speaker].

Saskatchewan's government will have to increase its interest payments [on the debt] to the tune of . . . \$20 million over last year's total because of the borrowing Thomson will need to achieve his "balanced" budget.

With most of the election-bound government's budget goodies having leaked out before Thomson stood in the house to make the details official, it's the summary budget shortfall that catches the eye.

Mr. Speaker, one more quote:

For Thomson to brag [about] . . . the current government has paid down debt by \$1 billion . . . makes no sense when this year's financial performance adds \$700 million to the debt.

Mr. Speaker, deficit 2007 is a giant step backwards for the people of Saskatchewan, and because of that I would like to move the following motion. I move, Mr. Speaker:

That all words after [and I quote] "That the Assembly" be deleted and the following be added:

condemn the government for plunging this province back into a deficit without creating a real growth agenda or

addressing the most pressing needs of Saskatchewan people.

I so submit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And seconded by the member for Martensville, and I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs, seconded by the member for Martensville:

That all the words after “That the Assembly” be deleted and the following be added:

condemn the government for plunging the province back into a deficit without creating a real growth agenda or addressing the most pressing needs of Saskatchewan people.

Debate continues on the amendment and the motion concurrently. The Chair recognizes the member for Martensville.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Heppner: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to be able to speak today. This is my maiden speech in this Assembly. I am told by my colleagues that after today I will no longer be free from heckling. I tried to postpone this as long as possible, but I was overruled.

I want to begin by thanking the good people of the Martensville constituency for their support. And it was a lot of support. We won the by-election with 77 per cent of the vote.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Heppner: — This is the best result the Saskatchewan Party has had in any riding. I’m here because of the people of Martensville, and I am here for them as well. Being the representative for thousands of people in my constituency is not something that I take lightly. I understand the awesome responsibility that they have given me.

It’s been a very busy few weeks for me. I went directly from an election night victory to being sworn in. While I have experience behind the scenes in politics, I realize that I still have much to learn. The member from Cannington has already been very helpful and informed me that my questioning in committees needs some work. I thank him for his advice, and I would like to thank all of my new colleagues for their acceptance, their support, and their encouragement.

I did not get here by myself, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Martensville constituency executive, all of the supporters and volunteers who helped out on the by-election. And for his tireless work and dedication, not only to me but to my father, I would like to thank my constituency assistant, Whitney Friesen. I’m now the third MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for whom he has worked. I told him the other day that he has now officially become an institution.

The efforts of all of these fantastic people have paid off. The people of Martensville sent a very clear message to the NDP that their time in office is quickly coming to an end.

I would also not be here without the support and encouragement of my family. As you know, we have had quite a difficult year, and I’m proud at how my family has rallied around me to support my decision to follow my father into politics. I thank my mom, Arlene, my brother Ken, his wife Sandy, my sister Lana, and her husband Lorin; and my fantastic nieces and nephews, Jasmine, Sharmaine, Dylan, little Ben, Meliva, and Noam. Perhaps in that batch there is a MLA-in-waiting to follow behind me.

I’ve had the opportunity to meet so many amazing people. The residents of Martensville are hardworking people. I’ve seen the benefits of this hard work as I visited the communities in the constituency. Martensville consists of rural communities and growing towns. It is made up of hardworking people who are constantly striving to improve their towns and to ensure a bright future for their children and families. It has many entrepreneurs who have established diverse and thriving businesses.

I have seen the effects of communities coming together. Whether it’s fundraising for a rec centre in Waldheim or a new fire hall in Osler, the residents of Martensville face challenges with determination and creativity.

I’ve witnessed and been the recipient of this sense of community where neighbours help one another. People like Dave Wiens, who plowed snow out of my yard without being asked; or Russ McAlpine and Terry Hack, who helped get my truck unstuck on election day; or Lanny Schmidt, who made sure my car got fixed as quickly as possible when I was campaigning — there’s a theme here: we have problems with vehicles — or Shauna Gamble, who volunteered to check my house while I’m gone to make sure that my basement isn’t flooding.

Like so many of the residents in my riding, I was also raised believing that if you work hard you should be rewarded. I was raised to believe that we should be able to keep as much of our hard-earned dollars in our own pockets, and that it was the role of government to operate responsibly to ensure that this happened.

And that leads me to discuss last week’s budget. After months of door knocking and speaking with residents, the concern that I heard repeatedly from business people and homeowners were worries over rising education property taxes. Last week’s deficit budget did nothing to address this important issue. For years this NDP government has promised to deliver much deserved relief. They promised long-term relief. For years these promises were not contingent on the delivery of an approved equalization deal from the federal government. I find it disappointing that this NDP government is again betraying the people of this province.

[15:00]

It was interesting that during the by-election campaign the NDP candidate stated in an interview with *The StarPhoenix* that no one was speaking to him about education property taxes. After

the completely dismal showing that the NDP had in that by-election, a mere 10 per cent of the vote, I would submit that it was simply a case that no one was speaking to him.

It is yet another example of how out of touch this NDP government is with the people of this province. A non-profit organization, a thrift store in my constituency, is currently paying \$10,000 in property taxes — \$6,000 of that is in education property taxes. While this organization works hard to raise funds that will eventually help the less fortunate, they were struggling under this tax burden. As you can imagine, the volunteers offer their time and effort to ensure the success of this business. It is frustrating for them to be donating so much of their time and talent only to see thousands of dollars in profits — that would otherwise go to help others — to be gobbled up in education property taxes.

I've received phone calls from seniors who are incredibly concerned over the increasing burden that they are facing from rising education property taxes. They are worried that they will no longer be able to stay in their own homes. I think this is appalling that this government's betrayal of Saskatchewan's homeowners could force seniors to move from their homes. These are homes that they have worked their entire lives to pay for and now, in their retirement, when they no longer have to work and have time to enjoy life, they are consumed by worries of whether or not they can stay in their own homes. It is a shameful reflection of this NDP government.

People in my riding are also concerned about reduced access to health care that they are witnessing every day. It was interesting as I was leaving Regina last Thursday on budget day, I passed a billboard that was sponsored by the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses. It was a picture of a closed sign over a hospital room and it said that hospital beds are closing due to a shortage of registered nurses. Currently in this province there are over 500 nursing positions that are vacant. Hospitals and clinics are desperate for nurses.

The president of Saskatchewan Union of Nurses herself has said that this NDP government's mismanagement of health care in this province is leading to a crisis situation. In a letter to the Premier last month she said, and I quote:

Saskatchewan must act immediately and aggressively to stop the bleeding, with a well-funded and comprehensive nursing strategy . . . Current retention and recruitment strategies are a completely inadequate response to both the current vacancy level and the fresh evidence that the health of the nursing workforce cannot be sustained under current conditions.

And what is this NDP government's response? They offer funding for a mere 18 new training seats for nurses in the next year. This is the legacy that the NDP is leaving in this province — hospital closures and massive nursing shortages. I am sure that this is not the legacy that Tommy Douglas envisioned for his province.

The NDP's assertion that this is a balanced budget is a bit of a stretch. It is hard to understand how a budget speech that begins with the glowing report of the economic boom in Saskatchewan ends with a budget that takes \$510 million from a rainy day

fund to keep it in the black.

We all know that the NDP really likes punctuation. After millions of dollars in failed ad campaigns to get back some of the population that has fled this province since the NDP has been in government, they recently spent \$1.5 million on an exclamation mark. They might want to think about continuing the punctuation campaign and add a question mark after the words balanced budget.

Residents in Saskatchewan who work hard and collect their paycheques know what a balanced budget is. They have their own household budgets where living expenses are carefully monitored to make sure that there's enough money to make it to the end of the month. The NDP has crafted a budget that pays for the first few weeks and then pays the rest of the month with a credit card. This is simply not sustainable and the NDP's own former Finance minister said that this budget is not sustainable.

In the 2000-2001 budget the NDP claimed that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was established for, and I'll quote:

The Fiscal Stabilization Fund will be available to the General Revenue Fund as a fiscal shock absorber to offset temporary revenue declines and meet exceptional requirements. In years when fiscal challenges are great, the Government will use [the] Fund . . .

The NDP is now taking credit for the sun that is shining in this province. Why then are they using a rainy day fund to make ends meet? Because on the eve of an election they are once again buying votes with voters' own money.

This budget does not address the issues facing my constituency — highways and roads, property taxes, and health care. Over the years the NDP has squandered millions in taxpayers' money. They seem to have forgotten that this is not their money. It is not their own personal piggy bank to use for their political gains.

The NDP budget is long on spending and short on vision. As Environment critic for the official opposition, I was listening very closely to the Finance minister's speech last week. I was keeping track of how many times he mentioned the environment. And how many times did he speak of the environment? Not once. Not once, Mr. Speaker. Imagine my surprise.

Protecting our environment for future generations is one of the most important challenges facing us in this century. It is one of the biggest concerns on the minds of people in Saskatchewan and in Canada. It was quite shocking to realize that it wasn't important enough for this NDP government to mention even in passing in the Finance minister's speech last week. It is up to us to lead by example and the NDP have offered no leadership on the environment.

Under the watch of this NDP government, greenhouse gases continue to rise. We have seen little from them on what their plans are to reduce this damage. We have been promised a green initiative plan in the near future. Their last attempt at putting forward a plan was met with criticism from the Sierra Club, who stated that the NDP were full of rhetoric, all talk and

no action. All talk and no action. This is a statement that applies to much of what the NDP does.

Despite their bluster over a zero tolerance for sexual harassment in the workplace, we have seen that this is simply not the reality for many women in this province. The NDP can talk all they want about having a zero tolerance but their actions show otherwise. I've spoken with one of Carriere's victims. I have seen the pain in her eyes and the disappointment in her voice.

It took the NDP government four years to finally offer an apology to the victims of Murdoch Carriere's harassment but it took them no time to offer him a \$275,000 settlement and a full pension. They defended their own actions but never once thought about defending these women. They espoused the need for equality yet offered Carriere's victims a fraction of what they willingly gave Carriere. Where is the equality in that?

I find it shocking that the NDP spent millions defending themselves all in the name of SPUDCO — a pile of potatoes — but refused to spend a dime defending these nine women. The victims of Carriere deserve to have their voices heard and I am proud to be a member of a party who's determined to make sure that this happens.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Heppner: — I made the decision to enter politics because I believed I could make a difference. I will continue to work to make sure that the voices of those who have been silenced are heard, and that the people who need a voice will know that they can find one in me. My dad taught me the importance of helping those around me. And in closing I would like to speak a few words about my father, Ben Heppner.

I was honoured to be here in this Assembly last fall for the tributes given to my dad, and I want to thank members from both sides of the House for their kind words. It has been said that my father left a legacy and I believe that he did, both politically and personally. Ten years ago he was one of the eight MLAs who came together from different political parties to form the Saskatchewan Party. They knew the potential of this province. They had a dream and a vision of what we could be. They knew that Saskatchewan needed an alternative to the NDP.

I remember sitting and talking with my dad 10 years ago. He had such excitement and passion about this new party and his province. He was so proud with the hard work of those first MLAs and his role in it. He was thrilled with the 25 seats that the Sask Party received in the 1999 election, the first election with Sask Party candidates on the ballot. He loved his time here and appreciated his friends and he liked telling people about his fellow OWLS [order of wily legislative sexagenarians]. He was particularly proud of the leadership of the member for Swift Current but more than that, he valued the friendship that they shared.

Dad was a high school teacher and principal for many years. I know that every new school year Dad made sure to find the invisible students — the kids with bad reputations, with low self-esteem, the kids that no one else wanted to be friends with. Dad found these kids and embraced them, made sure they felt

valuable, and befriended them.

Over the years I have met many of my Dad's former students and their parents. I know that Dad made a difference. He did this quietly and he didn't do it for personal gratification or public glory. He did it because he knew that these kids needed a friend. Dad did make a difference both politically and personally. If I can be half the person my father was, and make a fraction of the difference in the lives around me, I will consider his legacy secure and my life a success.

Four years ago, almost to the day, Dad stood in this Assembly and responded to the NDP Speech from the Throne. And in closing I would like to quote my father:

A government should be in power to serve all the people in the province. Not an NDP government . . . The sooner we get rid of them the better, Mr. Speaker, the sooner the better.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting this budget. To do so would be a betrayal of the massive majority of my constituents that voted against this government three weeks ago. I am pleased to second the amendment put forward by the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Saskatoon Centre, the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to stand in this Assembly today and speak to this budget motion on behalf of the people, the families of Saskatoon Centre.

Before I start, I want to wish my congratulations to the new member from Saskatoon . . . from Martensville on her maiden speech and her comments and especially her comments from her father. I know as a former minister he would question me and I always had a high respect for his integrity. So congratulations. I know it's a special honour and privilege to rise on behalf of our neighbours, our constituents, to make comment on this very important debate that we're about to enter into.

I too would like to start my comments, before we start, talking about my family. In fact, I'd like to thank them for their support — my wife, Dawn, and children, Cam and Reilly. In fact, my daughter who's in second year law was here on budget day and was witness to this, I think, great occasion for the people of Saskatchewan. And she enjoyed it thoroughly.

And I too would like to thank my office staff here in Regina and back home in Saskatoon so they fully understand the programs and opportunities here in Saskatchewan.

Now before I start talking about the budget specifically too, I'd like to take a moment to talk about Saskatoon Centre. It's a great, great constituency to represent. It's probably one of the most urban communities or constituencies in this province with the downtown of Saskatoon from the condos, the apartments, the business community that goes on there, out to the old

neighbourhoods of Caswell, Riversdale, Westmount, and Mount Royal. And in fact it has a special . . . I didn't realize this. That, you know, some of the businesses that are there, one for example, Star Egg downtown, where most of the eggs, if you buy an egg in Saskatchewan, finds its way through there. It has a tie back to agricultural days.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk today about responsibility and I want to talk about community. And I want to talk about the opportunities we now have in this province to make life better for Saskatchewan families. This budget is about the responsibility we have as legislators and as leaders in our communities to make sure that when we have prosperity, it benefits all Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, when first given a mandate, this Premier and this government clearly stated that we must have economic progress in this province. To that end, we worked hard to develop every sector of the economy. We reformed the natural resource royalty structures on oil, gas, potash, and uranium. In short, Mr. Speaker, in every area of natural resource production.

Mr. Speaker, we lowered the provincial income taxes to attract workers and keep people here in this province. This cut was necessary for skilled workers to make this province home and to encourage Saskatchewan residents not to make the Alberta mistake. This cut, in conjunction to our school division changes, brought fairness to the personal property tax structure here in Saskatchewan.

And last year, Mr. Speaker, we acted to make Saskatchewan an attractive place to do business. We lowered the business taxes of this province, including eliminating the corporate capital tax, to stimulate investment and create opportunities here for our families.

And what are the results of all of this, Mr. Speaker? Record housing starts in this province, record investments in this province. And the front page of the *Leader-Post* says it all when it shouts, "Jobs, Jobs, Jobs." Well, Mr. Speaker, our economic plan works — 14 consecutive balanced budgets, 16 credit upgrades since 1995, and the lowest debt-to-GDP [gross domestic product] ratio in almost 20 years.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this Premier and this NDP government believe that economic prosperity must benefit average Saskatchewan families. Working people in this province must feel that benefit. So starting with the Throne Speech last fall, we announced a 2 per cent cut to the provincial sales tax and the new Family Day holiday. Both of these measures were to ensure that the people of this province felt the benefit of our strong economy.

[15:15]

Now, Mr. Speaker, that was just the beginning. With this budget we are seeing what the honest fiscal policies of this Premier and this government mean — opportunity, Mr. Speaker. Opportunity to finally begin investing in Saskatchewan people and Saskatchewan communities again. Opportunity to build a better quality of life for all Saskatchewan people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this budget is a direct investment in the people of this province. We have created Saskatchewan's first universal prescription drug plan for seniors. Now most seniors live on a fixed income, and this plan will help ease the growing prescription drug burden that seniors face. Mr. Speaker, this plan places a \$15 per prescription cap on the cost of medications and expect it to save each of the 115,000 seniors in this province \$400 annually on average.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the seniors of Saskatchewan built this province. Their services to our communities built the quality of life that we enjoy today. We have a responsibility to help these people obtain the basic medications necessary for a healthy life.

This budget also contains a new dental sealant program for children in grades 1 and 7 in our community schools. Well, Mr. Speaker, this may not be a big dollar item but I know that for the people in my constituency it's a program of immense value. Good dental health is formed in childhood and it's been linked to a host of positive health benefits. Unfortunately though, ever since the child dental health program in this province was cut by the Grant Devine Conservatives, only the children of well-off parents have been able to afford basic dental care. So, Mr. Speaker, this program is the first step to ensure that all children in Saskatchewan have access to basic dental care regardless of their parents' income bracket.

Now of course, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the future of our province rests in the hands of our young people. That is why this government has created another first in Saskatchewan — the graduate tax exemption. This Premier and this government have worked tirelessly to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada for young people to live and to have great careers. A big part of that is to ensure that young people get the training they need to succeed. This graduation tax exemption creates incentive to learn. And, Mr. Speaker, it creates incentives for young people who are just starting their careers to start them here. Combined with existing exemptions, this plan provides recent graduates with \$20,000 of tax-free income per year, for the first five years following graduation. That is, Mr. Speaker, \$100,000 of tax-free income just for working in Saskatchewan when you graduate.

Now this is a strong message, Mr. Speaker — a strong message to young people of Saskatchewan and young people of Canada — saying, this province wants you and you have a bright future right here in Saskatchewan. And I might add, Mr. Speaker, that that bright future includes in the very near term, the Junos, the Canadian Country Music Awards, the Aboriginal Music Showcase, and the Western Canadian Music Awards.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are also addressing the front-end access to post-secondary education. This NDP government firmly believes that access to education should be based on achievement, ability, and hard work — not based on your ability to pay. To this end we have frozen the tuition fees of our universities for the third year in a row and provided funding in this budget for 2,100 new training spaces. This is investment, Mr. Speaker, investment in the future of Saskatchewan people. And this investment is possible because of the economic prosperity created by this government.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps nothing else speaks of investment in our

future like this government's green strategy. This budget contains new money for the Office of Energy Conservation to continue and expand their work combating climate change. It contains a \$7.5 million fund for green initiatives to help solve the problems of global warming.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this budget also includes a \$17.7 million increase to the ethanol fuel tax rebate for a cleaner, burning fuel. And there is also substantial new money in this budget for communities who wish to undertake their own climate change initiatives.

Now of course, Mr. Speaker, it is our communities that drive this province and this budget recognizes that. It includes a 30.8 per cent increase in revenue sharing for our urban, rural, and northern municipalities — something that Saskatoon Mayor Don Atchison called really good news for us. Now this money will allow those municipalities to invest in their infrastructure, invest in their cities and towns; investments I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that will improve the quality of life for all of Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, these investments build strong, healthy communities. They are about the responsibilities that we have during the times of prosperity to make sure that all citizens benefit from that prosperity. They show a Premier and an NDP government that acts decisively to make life better here at home for Saskatchewan families.

Now, Mr. Speaker, of course I have as Minister of Labour a particular interest in improving the lives of average working families in this province. The working people of Saskatchewan are the backbone of our economic progress, and we have a responsibility to ensure that they have the fairest and the safest workplaces here in Canada. Mr. Speaker, we are making progress for Saskatchewan workers in this budget. There is significant new investment in improving the occupational health and safety program for working people here in Saskatchewan.

Safety at the workplace means so much more than increased productivity. Injuries adversely affect all aspects of a person's life. Workplace injuries mean less time that families can enjoy their favourite activities together. Our work on phase 2 of the action plan for healthy and safe workplaces aims to reduce the time lost/injury rate ratio across the province by a further 13.5 per cent. And this additional investment will mean that roughly 4,500 workplace safety inspections will take place this year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we are also acting to address the discrimination of northern workers. As recommended in the northern exemption report by the member of Regina Northeast, there is money in this budget to open a labour standard's district office in La Ronge. This office will work with employees and employers to make sure that the workers in the North are treated fairly and receive the same protection as workers in the rest of this province.

Now one of the greatest things we can do to improve the lives of low-income workers is to ensure that they receive a fair wage for their work. Since this Premier took office, the government has raised the minimum wage by \$1.95 to a total of \$7.95 per hour. That, Mr. Speaker, is a 32 per cent increase. Yes. These raises to the minimum wage provide real, tangible benefits to

the lowest paid employees in our province. That extra \$1.95 an hour could mean the difference between buying groceries or going to the food bank, having a place to sleep or sleeping on the street. In addition, Mr. Speaker, this budget provides extra money to offset child-related costs for low-income earners. It will provide funding for an additional 500 licensed child care spaces. These offsets in the child care spaces give lower income parents flexibility. They provide an opportunity for parents to go to school or have a full-time job. An opportunity, Mr. Speaker, that might not otherwise be available.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is all part of our commitment in the Throne Speech to continue to improve work opportunities here in Saskatchewan. The new money for additional training seats and additional child care provided in this budget ensure that young, low-income parents have the opportunity to make meaningful changes in their lives. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget includes an additional \$2.5 million to expand the family health benefits plan. This will provide prescription drug and eye care coverage to approximately 30,000 adult, vulnerable workers.

Now in times of economic prosperity, Mr. Speaker, these are the kind of investments responsible governments make to improve the lives of all people, to ensure the prosperity gap does not widen, to ensure that you do not leave anyone behind on the road to opportunity. This budget, Mr. Speaker, is bold and innovative. It uses the resources of Saskatchewan to benefit Saskatchewan families.

It is a shame, Mr. Speaker, that the same cannot be said of the new federal Conservative equalization program. Prime Minister Harper and the 12 Conservative MPs [Member of Parliament] from Saskatchewan were unequivocal in their promise to the people of Saskatchewan, and they broke their promise, Mr. Speaker. Now they're waking up. Their promise was one of fairness, Mr. Speaker. Alberta did get a special exemption from equalization to develop their oil and gas industry in the 1970s, and of course Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador have the Atlantic Accord which provides to their citizens the full benefits of their resource revenues for a limited period of time. Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, had nothing, got nothing.

When Prime Minister Harper and his 12 Conservative MPs promised the people of Saskatchewan that we would be able to keep 100 per cent of our non-renewable natural resource revenues, it was a promise greeted with praise from all Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, because it is fair and is the right thing to do. But these Conservatives broke their promise. They took \$800 million from the people of Saskatchewan and . . . using it across this country to buy political favour. I think to say to the people of Saskatchewan that they feel betrayed is an understatement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan want answers, Mr. Speaker. And it's unfortunate that when this Premier called for an emergency debate on this issue, the members of the opposition voted against it. It is clear that someone in Ottawa pulled the leash of the Leader of the Opposition and told him to heel.

In a time investment, Mr. Speaker, the ability to use 100 per cent of the non-renewable natural resource wealth of this

province for the benefit of Saskatchewan people would have immense implications. Those resources come out of the ground only once, Mr. Speaker. You do not get to use them again. And I ask you to imagine, just imagine what we could do if the whole value of these resources was allowed to benefit the people of this province, the people of Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the economic growth of this province is not slowing down and it will not slow down as long as this Premier and this NDP government are in charge. It was this government that put the fiscal house of this province in order. We have restored the economic prosperity that was destroyed by the friends and the mentor of the Leader of the Opposition, the Conservative Grant Devine government. We have developed this economy through sound fiscal management, as well as aggressive social investment to encourage growth.

This is a strong economy, but it's also a balanced economy. And this balance and sustainable budget reflects that. While just this morning, Mr. Speaker, in fact Michael Gregory, a senior economist and professional budget analyst for BMO Capital Markets, said that this government has taken a responsible and sustainable approach to its finances. Mr. Speaker, for Mr. Gregory and the BMO Capital Markets, the proof is in the pudding when he says, "Name me one other jurisdiction anywhere that you can think of that . . . can point to 14 balanced budgets in a row." It means that we are doing things right.

This budget is sustainable precisely because of the economic choices we have made over the past four years. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this budget is only the beginning. Because of this NDP government, Saskatchewan will continue to grow. And as we grow, Mr. Speaker, this government will ensure that the average Saskatchewan person will continue to see direct benefits of this strong economy. Now is the time to invest, Mr. Speaker — invest in the economic prosperity that we enjoy today, invest in our children, invest in our young people, invest in the health of our seniors, and invest in our communities.

That is what this Premier and this NDP government will do, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work to make life better for average Saskatchewan families. And that is why I will support the main budget motion and I will vote against the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[15:30]

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the member for Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Hermanson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to enter into this budget debate. Before I get into my comments, I too would like to express my congratulations to the new member for Martensville on an excellent maiden speech.

You know, the longer you're in this political business the more impressed at least I have become with the quality of people who are entering this profession. I think it's wonderful to see younger people getting involved in politics. I think it's wonderful to see someone who has come from a political family

and been encouraged and stimulated to get involved in politics rather than being turned off politics.

So I think that says a lot for the quality of that family and for the quality and the insight of the people of the constituency of Martensville who came out in unprecedented numbers for a by-election to vote for my colleague. And I welcome her to the House and I congratulate her on her maiden speech. It was an excellent speech to listen to.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure, but this may very well be my last opportunity to speak to a budget. And I hear at least one member on the other side applauding that. If I've been a thorn in their flesh, Madam Deputy Speaker, they have certainly deserved it.

But before I get into these comments about the budget, I want to express some thanks. A member does not stand here without a strong and wonderful support base, and I have been blessed with a tremendous base of support, starting with my wife, Gail, who has stood by my side through almost 20 years of political involvement. She has been my greatest cheerleader and my strongest critic, and she has done it in a way that has strengthened me as a person. And for that I am truly appreciative and love her more than I have ever loved her before.

We also have three wonderful children, two of whom are married. I'd like to express my thanks for their support and encouragement over the years: for Ehren and Karen here in Regina; for Byron and Lisa who are up in Saskatoon; and for our daughter, who is currently in her third year of university at the University of Alberta, Marlyn. We certainly do, as parents, appreciate our children and the decisions they have made and the paths they are taking. They have been a real encouragement to their mother and father, and I want to thank them here on the record.

I also want to thank the constituents of the Rosetown-Elrose constituency who have been very special to me. It was amazing the night of the last election to watch the numbers come in and to find that I had 5,173 votes, the most received by any candidate in the province. That was truly humbling and something that I'm very thankful for, something I'm very proud of, and it's a number for which I have a lot of people that I owe a lot of gratitude and appreciation for their work.

Just, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a way of information, in second place — and I was very happy to defeat the member from Cannington in the race for the most votes — the member for Cannington had 5,115. And it was fun to surpass the Premier in his vote count by a rather substantial amount. The Premier garnered 3,608 votes.

The Rosetown-Elrose constituency is a thriving, aggressive, energetic riding. It's bordered on the west by the communities of Eston and Dodsland. On the north side the border goes between Rosetown and Biggar over north of Conquest to the South Saskatchewan River.

I represent the communities of Outlook, Broderick, Glenside on the east side of the river near Gardiner Dam. And then the south part of the riding includes the communities of Lucky Lake,

Beechy, and Kyle, back around to Eston, which I mentioned at the beginning.

This is an area, a farming area primarily, people who have made a living off of the land, raising crops and livestock. It is an area where irrigation plays a key role, a significant role, and where irrigation needs to be increased in its impact and significance. It's an area where there's oil and gas. And, Madam Speaker, it's an area where there's tremendous tourism potential — if only we could get a provincial government in place in this province that knew how to take advantage of those opportunities.

Madam Speaker, as I looked at the response to the Minister of Finance's budget, I was particularly intrigued by the response from Nola Joorisity of the chartered accountants' association. But I think if anybody can cut through all the numbers and all the nonsense and all the political spin on the budget, it should be Nola Joorisity of the chartered accountants' association. And this is what she said, Madam Speaker. She said:

Well it is a deficit budget, and the size of the deficit depends on what you include. If you look at just the general revenue fund which is where our taxes mostly go into, it's about a \$480 million deficit.

If you include Crown . . . [corporations] and things like the Auto Fund and Workers' Compensation, you're up at \$700 million.

Madam Speaker, this is from Nola Joorisity of the Saskatchewan chartered accountants' association. Obviously this kind of response to the budget carries a lot of weight.

But, Madam Speaker, I thought I better grab this document and have a look at it myself. On the very first page of the document the Minister of Finance says, "I invite you to browse this and other related documents . . ." So, Madam Speaker, that's exactly what I did. And when I got to page no. 14 of the *Saskatchewan Provincial Budget: Budget and Performance Plan Summary*, I noticed that on page 14 it says, "The 2007-08 GRF Budget represents the 14th consecutive budget on a GRF basis." On a GRF basis, General Revenue Fund basis.

Now, Madam Speaker, the government has a lot of accounts. They've got the GRF. They've got the rainy day fund. They have Crown corporation accounts. They have pension unfunded liability funds. And when you put them all together, you really get a clear picture of the financial situation of the government.

But, Madam Speaker, this government, this NDP government has things it likes to hide. And so basically what they do would be what you and I would do if we had a number of bank accounts. And if we withdrew a lot of money or borrowed on a lot of these accounts and then stuck all the money into one account, we could say that we had a surplus in that one account even though the deficits in all the other accounts far surpass the surplus in the one account. Let's say it's a chequing account. So, Madam Speaker, we've run our Visas to the max. We've borrowed on our savings account. We've turned in our RRSPs [Registered Retirement Savings Plan]. We have taken out our lines of credit, and we've dumped it all into that chequing account to say that we have a surplus in the chequing account.

Now we all know, Madam Speaker, that people, certainly bankers, anyone with any knowledge of finances — I would suggest even elementary grade school children — would figure out in a hurry that this is deceptive and this is just simply a way to try to mislead the general public to say that this is another balanced budget, in fact the 14th balanced budget.

And, Madam Speaker, I remember when the government went to summary financial statements at the urging, I might add, of the member for Canora-Pelly who suggested over and over again and made strong arguments that we should be doing our accounting on a summary financial basis. So we had officials from the Department of Finance, the minister's own department, come and brief the official opposition on what it meant to be moving to summary financial accounting. And these two officials that briefed our caucus said, really, what you need to look at now is not the GRF fund — I mean, that's a little interesting component — but you have to look at the whole picture.

And what you need to look at is what is the net debt? And the change in the net debt will tell you whether there's been a surplus or whether there's been a deficit. So with that backdrop, let's continue to browse through this book that the Minister of Finance, the NDP member for Regina South, has asked us to do.

And I look at page 18, and here's a graph that talks about debt servicing costs as a share of revenue. And we notice that it peaked in 1993-1994 — these are the Romanow years, Madam Speaker — and then they started to move down until '05-06. And now, '07-08, that number is back on the way up. Now, Madam Speaker, a financial mismanagement by this current Minister of Finance is starting to show in the graphs. The trend which was a healthy trend has been reversed, and now we are seeing that the debt servicing costs as share of revenue are actually increasing.

And I hope that the Minister of Finance is following along and browsing with me as he's asked me to do.

If you turn over to page 40, and we see the total debt of General Revenue Fund. And we see, Madam Speaker, that the government total debt on the bottom — the dark blue — kind of holds even at 7.3 billion, but we see that the Crown corporation total debt is starting to move up, and move up significantly. And the result is that the debt of the General Revenue Fund has increased by \$300 million, Madam Speaker.

Now if we continue to follow the Finance minister's recommendation to browse his budget so we're . . . I mean they're chirping . . . I see the Minister of Health from North Battleford chirping. He doesn't want me to browse the budget like the Finance minister suggested. He wants to keep people in the dark. He wants people to be unaware of what's going on with this budget. Well, Madam Speaker, we will not be silenced on this side of the House by any bullying or any chirping from the Minister of Health from North Battleford because we want to get to the bottom of this budget. We do want to browse it and find out exactly what's going on.

Well if we look at page 50, Madam Speaker, which shows revenues that this government receives, and I see that revenues

are up, Madam Speaker, revenues are up. The tax revenue is up. Corporate capital tax revenue is up. Corporate income tax revenue is up. Fuel tax revenue is up. Individual income tax revenue is up. It just goes up, up, up, up. I see one down. That's the sales tax is down a little bit. But the end result is that tax revenue is up substantially from \$4 billion to \$4.1 billion.

Well we look at the non-renewable resource revenue. And we see that revenues from natural gas are up, from potash are up, other is up. There's just up, up, up, up.

And at the end we see, Madam Speaker, that this government does not have a revenue problem. This government is rolling in money. In fact in the current fiscal year, they're expecting to take in \$7,869,300,000. That's a lot of money, Madam Speaker. That comes from hard-working taxpayers who pay their taxes. It comes from businesses who have invested in the province of Saskatchewan. And they, Madam Speaker, have increased the revenue available to the NDP.

So what do the NDP do? Well we have to look at the next page, page 51. And this just blows you away. We realize that no, the NDP government does not have a revenue problem, but indeed they do have a spending problem. We look at almost every department where we see spending up significantly. And we see that this government wasn't able to live within its means. In fact, Madam Speaker, spending by the NDP government in the last year has risen from \$7,700,292,000 all the way up to 8,349,730,000 jobs. That's a lot of money. That's a lot more money than they take in in taxes and in revenue.

So we need to get to this bottom line. We need to get to page 58. This is the page that the Department of Finance told the opposition to go to see whether or not we had a surplus or whether we have a deficit budget. So I look at net debt at the end of the year . . . or actually net debt at the beginning of the year — 7.825 billion. Net debt at the end of the year — \$8,751,400,000.

An Hon. Member: — What page? What page?

Mr. Hermanson: — That's on page 58. I hope the Finance minister has a look at it.

So I don't know how the Finance minister can get up in his seat on budget day and say that this is the 14th consecutive balanced budget because, Madam Speaker, it is not a balanced budget. It is a deficit. It is a significant deficit. It is increasing the debt of the people of Saskatchewan. It is a burden on the young people of this province.

It's no wonder that young people are supporting the Saskatchewan Party. They're voting for the member for Martensville. They voted for the member for Weyburn-Big Muddy because they're tired of the mismanagement of the NDP government. They're tired of the false stories they've heard from the NDP government. They're tired of hearing about umpteen balanced budgets when in fact more budgets have been deficits than have been surpluses in the last 14 years.

Now I suppose, Madam Speaker, that if the government had all this money and were actually spending in a way that helped Saskatchewan people, that they could argue that, you know, that

there was at least some good out of spending more than you make. So I looked at this budget and I thought, what is the consequence of the NDP spending more money than they've ever spent before with revenues that don't meet their expenditures?

[15:45]

And I look at the result, and what do I see as a result? I see fewer people in Saskatchewan today than I saw last year. I see a drop of tens of thousands of people since the NDP took over this government back in 1991. Madam Speaker, I see communities decimated by the NDP. I see the volunteer base in this province reduced, eroded.

Madam Speaker, I see the disappointment in people whose family members have left the province. Children have left parents. Grandparents have seen their children and grandchildren leave the province of Saskatchewan to find employment and make a life somewhere else.

Madam Speaker, I see enrolments in school dropping in Saskatchewan, far fewer students in this province than we've seen before. Following the drop in enrolment of students, I see fewer teachers teaching in this province. Madam Speaker, at the same time I see property taxes increase to fund education.

It is interesting that the current Finance minister was formerly the minister of Education. And we talked to him in estimates. We talked to him in Public Accounts. And he said, you know, we're going to get this inequity in the funding of education, of primary education, corrected in Saskatchewan. We're going to change the formula. And we're going to amalgamate the districts into big, huge districts. And we're just going to get everything back on track.

And he knew that in the Rosetown-Elrose constituency the majority of the school districts were zero-based boards where 100 per cent of the funding for education came from the property tax payers, and nothing came from the province of Saskatchewan in the way of transfers to the school district. And the minister of Education at the time, now the Minister of Finance, said he was going to fix this problem.

Well, Madam Speaker, they changed. They amalgamated a number of districts so now the school districts are larger than the provincial ridings that they used to be within, that they used to lie within. Madam Speaker, they have accommodated the government's wishes, and they are functioning as best they can. But in fact these zero-based boards — which actually saw in some cases a slight reduction in the mill rate and in other cases quite a significant increase in the mill rate — are now seeing an overall increase in mill rates to the point to where within a year or so they will be zero-based boards again. And 100 per cent of their funding will once again come from the property tax payers of Saskatchewan.

This is blatantly unfair. This is a breach of trust upon the people of Saskatchewan by the NDP government. It is unconscionable. It is wrong. The Premier said he wouldn't do it, but he has done it. The Minister of Finance said he wouldn't do it, but he did it. He used to be the minister of Education. He said he wasn't going to do it, but it's happened. I've not heard an apology. I've

not heard of any emergency meetings to fix the problem. The NDP just seem to be quite happy having misled the people of Saskatchewan and hurt the education system as a result.

Madam Speaker, we also have the crummiest highways in Canada. And I'm sorry to say that I have more than my fair share of them in the riding of Rosetown-Elrose. These are roads that are really not fit to be driven on. They're not safe. They're a danger to people. They are hard on the equipment. A vehicle that might last, you know, for 4 or 500,000 kilometres in other parts of Canada will wear out in half the time or with half the mileage here in Saskatchewan because of the deplorable state of the roads.

So the NDP have this windfall of money, more money than they've ever been able to get their grubby little paws on before in their entire life. And what have they done with it? They have the worst roads that we've seen in Saskatchewan in decades. Madam Speaker, there isn't a highway . . . Not even the twin highways, not even Highway 11 and the TransCanada, are without potholes and ruts. You know, if our best highways are deplorable, can you imagine the state of our secondary highways? They are absolutely awful. They are an embarrassment. They are disgraceful. And I see members on the other side laughing. They don't care. That is particularly disheartening.

Madam Speaker, I see hit-and-miss service by the Riverhurst ferry. I wonder if they've got it fixed this winter. It'll be interesting to see what kind of a season the Riverhurst ferry has in the coming year. But with all this money, up to this point, they haven't been able to get the problem fixed.

Madam Speaker, I've seen intolerable living conditions for level 4 patients in Rosetown because this government will not provide a facility that is worthy of placing our seniors and other people who need extended care. Madam Speaker, they are placed in a basement. They are placed in intolerable positions. The Health minister should hang his head in shame that to the seniors of this province and to the most vulnerable people in this province, he would stick them in a basement where they're not seen, tell them to shut up and not ask for better living conditions. I think it's intolerable. And I think that member should resign if he can't provide better service for our seniors and vulnerable people than he has shown to the people of Rosetown who he has refused to provide adequate level 4 health care.

Madam Speaker, we have seen the withdrawal of service from rural Saskatchewan. This government has decided that they've given up on rural Saskatchewan. So the Health minister, the former Health minister, who's now I believe the Minister of Environment, went and opened up a new hospital or announced a new hospital would be built in Outlook. And then subsequently either he or the current Health minister decided to withdraw the local laundry service. Let's get rid of some jobs in rural Saskatchewan. Let's take away laundry service from the Outlook Hospital.

And then that wasn't good enough. They said, we've got a SaskPower office in Rosetown. Can't let them have any service in rural Saskatchewan. Let's shut that SaskPower office down. I sent a note over to the Minister Responsible for SaskPower the

other day. Hasn't had the decency to get back to me yet.

He plans to shut that office down on the March 31. It doesn't matter whether it's needed. Doesn't matter what the consequences are. Doesn't matter that it's an erosion of service to rural Saskatchewan, to the community of Rosetown and the surrounding areas. He could care less about rural Saskatchewan. He could care less about the needs of the people of Saskatchewan. He says it's going to shut down on March 31 and hasn't even been so kind as to respond to the note that I sent him the other day.

Madam Speaker, when I see a government that's spending more money than they've ever spent in their history and provide so little service, it breaks your heart. Madam Speaker, there are a lot of other areas that I'd like to cover, but my time is coming to an end.

On the Intergovernmental Affairs file, Madam Speaker, we see Alberta and BC [British Columbia] co-operating through the TILMA [Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement] agreement. We see their economies moving forward. We see this government dragging its heels, afraid of the unions or whatever, afraid of their shadow, perhaps, Madam Speaker. But they have to study it and study it and study it.

Madam Speaker, there's no way that they'll sign on to the TILMA agreement before the next election. It's going to take a new government with some vision and with some hope and some optimism about Saskatchewan to do bold things like sign on to the TILMA agreement and get this province rolling.

Now, Madam Speaker, the NDP are always looking for someone to blame for their own incompetency. Now I was first elected in 1999. I've watched these members face crisis after crisis, come short time after time after time. It used to be when I would sit in my chair, Madam Speaker, they'd say, oh, it's the Liberals in Ottawa that are the problem. We can't do anything about health care. We can't do anything about equalization. We can't do anything about agriculture. We're helpless NDPers. We don't know how to do anything. It's the Liberals' fault.

Well we got rid of the Liberals and now the Conservatives are in. And Mr. Strahl brings a few million dollars it seems like every other week. And the Minister of Agriculture insults him every time he comes out here. And now the equalization didn't turn out the way we all wanted it to, so now it's all the Conservatives' fault. And the NDP relish in the fact that now they can point their fingers at the NDP.

You know, they've also pointed their fingers at Alberta. It's all Alberta's fault. If it wasn't for Alberta next door, we'd be just fine in Saskatchewan. But they have some leadership. They have some good government to the west of us. Makes the NDP look bad. So rather than getting things fixed here in Saskatchewan, they look at Alberta and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, we don't want to be like Alberta. It's all Alberta's fault that we have any problems here in Saskatchewan. And then if that's not good enough they'll find Quebec, or they'll blame George Bush, or they'll blame — who knows? — the United Nations. I don't know who they'll find next to blame for their problems. It reminds me, Madam Speaker, of the old Flip Wilson signature line, the devil made me do it. I'm sure that's the next person

they're going to blame for all their problems.

Well, Madam Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are tired of excuses. They're tired of a melancholy, ship shod government. They want change. That's why they're going to get change when the next election occurs. And that's why I'm going to support the amendment and vote against this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for The Battlefords, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to rise and speak to this budget, November 2007, part of this government's progressive approach to making life better for the people of Saskatchewan. Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that the members of this House enjoyed the Minister of Finance's introduction of the budget late last week.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance spent months consulting with members of the Saskatchewan public, working with stakeholders across this province, working with individual members of this legislature, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, has crafted a budget that certainly makes life better for the people of Saskatchewan and gives young people, Madam Deputy Speaker, gives young people an opportunity to consider building their careers right here in this great province.

Madam Deputy Speaker, all residents of Saskatchewan are going to benefit — in fact are benefiting — from the prosperity of this province as a result of actions taken late last year in our reconciliation of last year's third quarter results and the direction outlined in the budget in front of us today. Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget provides benefits and opportunities to improve life for particularly seniors, for young people, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, for municipalities in this province — a net benefit actually for every single resident of the province of Saskatchewan.

So my thanks, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the Minister of Finance and my colleagues here on this side of the House, a government that is showing the ability to be responsive to the people of the province, proven to listen to the residents of Saskatchewan, and, Madam Deputy Speaker, are not afraid to be bold in our leadership capacity in presenting a budget that provides these benefits.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take the opportunity also to thank the residents of The Battlefords constituency for their continued support in the work that I've had the opportunity to provide over the last three years. And I hope to be able to continue to work with the residents of The Battlefords for many years to come, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Battlefords is a very interesting constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although it's considered an urban constituency, the majority of people who live within The Battlefords — within the boundaries of the city of North Battleford and the town of Battleford — Madam Deputy Speaker, the people there either have come from rural Saskatchewan, grew up in rural

Saskatchewan, or have family members in rural Saskatchewan. Our economy is built around servicing rural Saskatchewan, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Because we are considered an urban constituency, Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes people have the idea that in fact these are big city people. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, the folks in The Battlefords are salt of the earth. They're from the land. They benefited from the land for years.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, they have reviewed this budget over the course of the last few days, over the weekend. And those, Madam Deputy Speaker, who spoke to me at the hockey rink, at the grocery store, on the main street of North Battleford, at the curling club's annual general meeting on Saturday night — those residents of the community, Madam Deputy Speaker, said that we are going in the right direction: our tax reductions, our support for seniors and health care and young people, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Madam Deputy Speaker, our debt reduction strategy. Madam Deputy Speaker, they have indicated to me that they are very supportive of the direction that this government is taking.

And therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm very pleased and very proud to be able to bring that message back to this legislature and, through this legislature back to them, Madam Deputy Speaker, indicate that I will continue to listen to them and to work with them to achieve even bigger and brighter things for northwest Saskatchewan and for ultimately all of Saskatchewan.

[16:00]

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of The Battlefords, I had the opportunity to review the budget in great detail, and I thought I should perhaps outline some of the things that aren't jumping right out at everyone about the support that this budget provides to residents in The Battlefords.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you are aware that not too long ago this government announced a commitment to the rebuilding of the Saskatchewan Hospital in The Battlefords; Saskatchewan Hospital, Madam Deputy Speaker, that provides mental health services, forensic services, psychiatric institutional services to all the people of Saskatchewan. And it's located in The Battlefords area, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This budget now, in addition to the funding for the new \$60 million facility for the Saskatchewan Hospital, this budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, does two things. Within the context of this budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, is \$1 million to further the planning process to ensure that we have a new facility, a new structure that indeed not only recognizes and represents the issues in mental health for the province of Saskatchewan today, Madam Deputy Speaker, but will take into account the fact that this institution, this facility, and the services provided in it are going to last the people of this province for tens and tens of years, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Therefore when we have the opportunity to plan once in our lifetime for a facility like this, we've got to ensure that we recognize the needs of Saskatchewan people 10 years, 20 years, and 30 years out, Madam Deputy Speaker. This budget contains

\$1 million to facilitate that planning process to ensure that we get it right. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can say to the people of The Battlefords and Saskatchewan, the planning process is going according to schedule, Madam Deputy Speaker, and during the course of this year that planning process will be completed.

Secondly, Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget contains in our training area, from Advanced Education and Employment, the development of a brand new psychiatric nursing program. Madam Deputy Speaker, we will be creating a new psychiatric nursing program through training seats advanced in this budget to enhance the ability to deliver services, mental health services, at the Saskatchewan Hospital in North Battleford.

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, what this does, by allowing us to introduce the funding for these new training seats in registered psychiatric nursing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is to give the opportunity now to plan forward in the construction and development of the construction processes for this facility, Madam Deputy Speaker, an opportunity to examine delivering that program in The Battlefords, Madam Deputy Speaker, not only a new program, not only a program to enhance and support training services but, Madam Deputy Speaker, a new program that could be delivered right there in The Battlefords. I'm very excited about that potential, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I'm looking forward to the year as we discuss how to implement this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Prairie North Regional Health budget, there are additional resources to take a look at the expansion of the renal dialysis unit, Madam Deputy Speaker — a unit that's been under a lot of pressure, a unit that is very well supported from people in northwest Saskatchewan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a few years ago the dialysis system in Saskatchewan was delivered from Saskatoon and Regina. Madam Deputy Speaker, over the last five years the province have expanded the dialysis capacity in this province so that now every single regional hospital, and in fact now two district hospitals, have renal dialysis capacity. We are continuing to expand the capacity of the renal dialysis system in this province, Madam Deputy Speaker, further enhancing the lives of those people who unfortunately require the dialysis services, but now we're seeing pressure to expand the delivery of those services in the satellites that have just recently been created. Madam Deputy Speaker, we've got expansion in Yorkton taking place as we speak, and this budget contains resources to allow Battlefords Union Hospital to expand its dialysis system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, also this budget contains the money necessary to support a community recreational infrastructure — Madam Deputy Speaker, a program that was announced after the third quarter of last year; Madam Deputy Speaker, a program that is financed in this budget in front of us. Madam Deputy Speaker, individuals within The Battlefords are taking a look at a multi-purpose facility that will include a new curling rink, a new swimming pool, a performing arts centre, perhaps a soccer field, perhaps an additional skating rink. Madam Deputy Speaker, the people of The Battlefords are prepared to provide considerable funding to support a new recreational and cultural facility. Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget contains resources to provide provincial support to that very important local

program.

And while we're talking about municipal infrastructure, Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget contains the single largest increase in revenue sharing in the history of this revenue-sharing program, Madam Deputy Speaker: \$30 million over the course of the province, Madam Deputy Speaker. Municipalities will now be able to use these dollars, these new dollars, to enhance the services or, Madam Deputy Speaker, maintain the tax base or even reduce the property tax base within their own jurisdictions. Madam Deputy Speaker, this budget provides resources to municipalities unheralded in the history of this province, Madam Deputy Speaker. And we're very happy to be able to provide citizens who pay property tax in our communities, and The Battlefords are no exception, Madam Deputy Speaker . . . resources to citizens who pay property tax an opportunity to know that their provincial government is sharing in the resources that provide support to our municipalities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in The Battlefords of course we also have an urban park. There are five of them around the province. This budget contains additional support for the urban park, the River Valley Park in The Battlefords between the town of Battleford and the city of North Battleford. Madam Deputy Speaker, later this week the Minister of the Environment will accompany me in the city of North Battleford or the town of Battleford in order to unveil the exact dollar value available for the 2007-2008 year for support of the urban park, dollars greater than were there last year, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Also we can't forget the highway infrastructure that's going to support northwest Saskatchewan and the twinning of Highway 16 between the town of Battleford and the city of Lloydminster. Madam Deputy Speaker, there's funding in this particular budget that will finally complete the twinning of that piece of highway there, the Yellowhead Highway, what is now one of Canada's trans-Canada highways, Madam Deputy Speaker — something that I've proudly worked on for almost my entire political career, the twinning of the Yellowhead Highway from Manitoba to Alberta, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are just about finished that portion that I've travelled the most, Madam Deputy Speaker: Saskatoon through Lloydminster. And I'm very delighted that during the course of my political career I've been able to support a provincial government that's been very supportive of the work that is taking place there.

On top of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a \$5 million program to support the rural municipalities in the Lloydminster area, the rural municipalities that are subject to heavy-haul oil, Madam Deputy Speaker. They've been asking this government for some time to support their interests there to ensure that there are not undue burdens put on the oil and gas sector, Madam Deputy Speaker, because of the way in which they utilize those rural roads.

Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, those rural municipalities came to this government. They outlined their plan. This government listened and acted, and this budget provides additional support to northwest Saskatchewan rural municipalities specific to the interests that they have raised with us. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am just absolutely delighted with the support that this budget provides to residents of The Battlefords and northwest

Saskatchewan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these resources are going to — Madam Deputy Speaker, without question, without a doubt — provide net benefits to young people, to seniors, to municipalities, property tax payers right across the piece of northwest Saskatchewan. We are making life better for Saskatchewan residents.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to indicate that this budget very much follows the session that we're in. Madam Deputy Speaker, we can't forget that this session began in October of last year and this government at that point provided a signal to the people of Saskatchewan about where in fact the next year would go. The Throne Speech in October 2006, Madam Deputy Speaker, clearly outlined a strategy that this budget is now closely delivering on.

What was in that Throne Speech, Madam Deputy Speaker? We can't forget October 2007 where the Throne Speech says, and I quote:

The focus for my government in this Session is to make life better for today's Saskatchewan families, and to build an even better future here for young people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the four cornerstones outlined clearly in the Throne Speech:

- [No. 1] Make Saskatchewan the best place for young people to live, work, and build strong futures;
- [No. 2] Strengthen Saskatchewan's leadership in improving public health care while reducing wait times and improving access to services;
- [No. 3] Advance Saskatchewan as a leader in environmental protection and the green economy; and
- [4] Ensure that today's Saskatchewan families benefit from our strong economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, look within those four cornerstones set out in October last year. Compare it to the initiatives that have taken place since then and, more specifically, the initiatives contained in this budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, it provides support for seniors, for youth, for the environment, for municipalities.

And the Saskatchewan families benefit, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the resource revenues, from the prosperity that Saskatchewan is enjoying today. Madam Deputy Speaker, that Throne Speech clearly set out a stage, a line of action that this government has stepped forward and has followed very, very clearly.

Compare that to, Madam Deputy Speaker, some of the things that were happening back in the 1980s when the members opposite had control of the public purse, Madam Deputy Speaker. When people in this province have an opportunity to examine what kind of government do they want to see provided by the people they elect, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are two records, two records that the people of Saskatchewan can look back on.

Number one is the record of the '80s that these members

opposite were engaged in. And number two is the record of this government, Madam Deputy Speaker, since we took office in 1991. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, the record is clear as a bell. Madam Deputy Speaker, the record is clear as a bell.

There is no doubt, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Saskatchewan people cannot support the type of government that was brought forward in the 1980s. Madam Deputy Speaker, the support that this government has been able to provide in direct response to the needs of Saskatchewan people — what a difference, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Earlier today, earlier today when the member from Saskatoon was on his feet in statements by members, he pointed out very clearly in fact the way in which budget deficits were built in this province. Take a look back to the 1980s and the government of Grant Devine where, Madam Deputy Speaker, they didn't have surplus accounts to draw from as we do in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Madam Deputy Speaker, to ensure that all programs are able to be funded, Madam Deputy Speaker, and have balanced budgets.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let's take a look back to 1985 after the Grant Devine government was kind of on a roll trying to find a way out of the crazy election promises that it made to Saskatchewan people. And it resulted in the selling off of highway equipment at bargain basement prices and, Madam Deputy Speaker, building swimming pools and hot tubs for the rich all across this province. Madam Deputy Speaker, they built a deficit that was . . . We're still not out of that area, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The 1985 budget of the Grant Devine budget had a deficit, a deficit that had nothing to back it up or support it, no assets to back it up, Madam Deputy Speaker — \$578 million. They followed that up, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 1986 with a budget deficit of \$1.2 billion. This is back, Madam Deputy Speaker, when the total revenues for the province were hardly over \$5 billion a year and 1.2 billion in overspending.

Then in 1987 they followed that up with another \$500 million deficit, Madam Deputy Speaker, with no plan, no plan of action whatsoever as to how to pay off any of this debt. We just keep building it up and hope that one day something will happen to correct this. Then we go to 1991 when that government of Grant Devine wouldn't even table a budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. Wouldn't even table a budget. But they had a budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. And that budget had a deficit in it — \$842 million, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The people of Saskatchewan had enough. The people of Saskatchewan said, no more; we want nothing to do with that crowd any more, Madam Deputy Speaker. And they elected a New Democratic Party government in 1991.

[16:15]

And between 1991 and the end of that decade, in 2000, Madam Deputy Speaker, this government worked darned hard to rebuild this province, Madam Deputy Speaker, to rebuild confidence from the people of Saskatchewan, from the business community, from others outside; to build a province that was, people had the confidence to put new investments in place,

Madam Deputy Speaker. We did that. We did that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

And now, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the year 2000 to the year present, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2007, we've had the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of a strong economy — an economy where the people have confidence in their government. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, that confidence has resulted in prosperity. That prosperity is now being shared with the people of Saskatchewan in this budget. Madam Deputy Speaker, we are making life better for Saskatchewan families. We are building a province in which young people can have an opportunity to build their careers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am proud to be a Saskatchewan resident. I'm proud to be a New Democrat. I'm proud to be a member of this government. Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member for Arm River-Watrous.

Mr. Brkich: — Madam Deputy Speaker, it's good to join this particular budget debate and express the views of my constituents from Arm River-Watrous. I want to congratulate the member for Martensville on her excellent speech and her winning in Martensville which I think has set the tone — same as the one in Weyburn — that has set the tone that is going to be carrying on to the next election because the people are tired of this government. They are sick and tired of this government. Doesn't matter where you go. They were sick and tired in rural Saskatchewan of it a year or last election. But now it's the cities are tired of it. They are tired of this particular government. It has no direction. And now coming out with this deficit budget.

When you talk to people throughout my constituency, but I don't know, even in the newspapers, even today when you're in the city, they're talking about this government doing a deficit budget. And that's what it is. Under summary financing, it is a deficit budget. It's \$700 million in debt. And the people aren't impressed with that. You know this budget does, I'll admit this budget does a few good things. Every budget has to have a few good things in it. But this budget goes nothing to further the province of Saskatchewan, no long-range plan.

All it does is working towards dividing rural Saskatchewan and urban again, and even First Nations. This budget is trying, like this NDP has done time after time, trying to drive a wedge out. My constituency, my constituency alone there's four schools closing. And this government talks about how this province is growing, how this population is growing.

Well why didn't you give some more extra funding for education? With Horizon, right now they only get . . . 27 per cent of their budget comes from the provincial government. The rest, Madam Deputy Speaker, comes from the taxpayers. Sun West is 12 per cent. I was at a meeting just a month ago when they were doing the review and talking to the people about the school closures. Twelve per cent comes from the government. The rest is picked up by taxpayers. And you wonder why people in rural Saskatchewan are fed up and sick and tired of

this particular government with that.

They were looking towards this budget for some direction. They were looking for this to have some confidence in rural Saskatchewan in them schools and in them towns. And there was nothing; the grants were shrunken. The only part of the education budget that grew was extra money to cover the teachers' salaries was put in, but there was nothing to actually, actually to help these schools stay open. So unfortunately we're going to be looking at possibly school closures in a province that should be growing and will grow if it had the right government in place. And right now we don't have the right government in place and that's why the people of Saskatchewan have lost confidence in this government. It has no direction of where it's going, no long-range plan when it comes to that with the school divisions out there.

Some of the schools out there that they're looking at closing have 100 students in there. Imperial has 100 students and you're looking, you have that school under review for closure. That's an absolute shame up there, moving 100 students throughout the province.

No long-range plans on highways. The minister talks about highways. If you look at the plan, every year they put about 300 to \$400 million into it. Now they're talking about this huge plan that's going in there. It's not hardly any extra money. I was at a meeting last week called line 19, which is a highway, 19 Highway out there. That's the mayors along the line, that's the reeves from the municipalities are in it, the REDA [regional economic development authority] people. There was even people from the government that were there; the Highways had some officials there.

And they said, okay what's your plan on this? Supposedly the Minister of Highways made this long-range plan commitment. Highway 19 feeds Lake Diefenbaker, one of the biggest tourist areas in the province of Saskatchewan, and it has been beaten up for a number of years.

And then people asked the Highway officials, what's your plan for Highway 19? You know, you've laid out, your minister's laid out this grand plan. He's made these big announcements. What is it? And they said, you know, we don't know. They said, for this year we're just going to be patching again. He said, that's all we're going to be able to do on Highway 19. It's slated . . . For a highway that services one of the biggest tourist areas in Saskatchewan under the long-range plan is yes, we're just going to be patching the holes again.

And they said, with what — with the cold mix again, with gravel, a little bit of cold mix? And he says, yes probably. He says, we don't even know if we're going to be able to get hot mix for it. So I mean, there's going to be broken windshields. Them holes are going to be pounded out again. Madam Deputy Speaker, no plan — that's why they're not selling this budget.

Highway 15, just further up, there's a stretch of it about, it's about 2 miles. They started work last fall on it, right basically in October — tore the pavement up, tore the gravel up, and then naturally, it froze. They couldn't do any work. And it's just a quagmire right now. I've gotten calls and we've I know sent some calls to the minister's office on it, you know. And right

now they can't do any work because, I mean, how can you work in this kind of weather till the frost leaves the ground? I mean, that should have been done in the fall.

And the people that were at the meeting from the Department of Highways knew it was supposed to be done, and they admit it. And they said but, you know, coming from Regina, we just, the funding either comes late or all of a sudden. They'll just say in late October, we got a little extra money. We want you to go finally patch this thing that you asked, that part. The regional director in that area had asked for that to be fixed in June. When do you get the money? In October. He said well yes, we got to start.

You know, that is why there's no faith in this particular government on this budget. People of Arm River-Watrous I mean, I was out there on the weekend, don't like this budget. I mean, they don't like this government. I mean, that's well known. I've said that many, many times, and the proof is they still elect me here. So I mean, that's proof that I'm not really lying that they don't like this government and this budget. But this one was even more, this budget was even more, they were even more disgusted about this particular budget.

They were thinking that this province is maybe hopefully trying to turn around with it. And where they see rural Saskatchewan population lost, a government that continually forgets about rural Saskatchewan in any way it can . . . all the services that's yanked out, the rural service centres a couple of years ago that were yanked out. We've had our SaskPower office taken out. Every day, every day I present petitions on the section shop in Watrous. And even though the minister gets them, he says yes we're not going to touch it. But the union has said that they've seen that document. And you know what? The people of Watrous, they believe that. They signed that. They send it to my office all the time. And constantly when I'm up in Watrous, they feel that if this government is elected one more time that they will lose that section shop. And I firmly believe that they will, that this government will yank one more thing out of rural Saskatchewan.

SaskPower, if you're on the farm, for infrastructure you pay 50 cents more on your bill than anybody else, any other residents. You pay more than if you do in a town, a city, a village, or in an urban area. You pay 50 cents more. Now where's equal? The Premier, I've heard him say everybody in this province is treated equal. Everybody, when it comes to delivery of services, everybody is treated equal. Yet if you live on a farm in Saskatchewan, you pay 50 cents more on your bill than an urban resident does. Why is that? You know, I thought everything was supposed to be equal in this province at that end of it.

You know, there's another thing that isn't addressed in this budget. You know, out of . . . There isn't one thing out there that's basically out there to help rural Saskatchewan at that. And with that, it's going just . . . Just the apathy and the disgust for this government has been growing in rural Saskatchewan since '99. But right now with the two by-elections, one in Weyburn and one in Martensville, it's going into the city.

When I was door knocking in Martensville and Warman, those are people that work in the city. And all you got to do is look —

472 votes. I mean they weren't even close in any of the polls. I was up there that night. I mean, you know, the polls that come in, it'd be like 50 for Saskatchewan Party, 2 for the NDP; 48 for Saskatchewan Party, maybe 3 for the NDP. Them people work in the city. And you know when I was door knocking there, they said that the people they work with are disgusted with them in the city, this particular government.

So I mean we are possibly looking at a sweep throughout this province. And I mean that is what this province needs to grow with that. And that is why . . . And this budget out there has . . . not going to change one person's mind on that, Deputy Speaker, not one person's mind at that.

You read the papers. You read the editorials. You listen to the talk shows. There's been nobody that's been switching with this budget. They all feel that this budget has no long-range plan under this particular government. We're not going to grow. We've been sitting stagnant for 10 to 15 years under this government. And they know that if, if they elect them, if this government were to be elected again, the very slim chance if it was to be elected again, that this province would still be stagnant at that.

In this budget there was nothing mentioned about biofuel industry. I did not see one thing in that budget dealing with biofuel industries. I have two plants that are struggling to get up and running. One of them is in Loreburn and another one's in Nokomis, you know, and they were looking towards this budget for anything added. And they weren't looking for handouts. That's one of the things; they weren't looking for a handout.

I know one of the members just hollered well they were looking for money. No, they weren't looking for handouts. They were looking for infrastructure money. They were looking for investment on the highways so they can haul . . . the road. Highway 20 they need that primary weight. They need that so they can be competitive. Highway 19 isn't even . . . it's just a goat trail. And yet them people, you know what they said when they're building that? They told the Department of Highways that that line 19 . . . [inaudible] . . . we're building it no matter what. No matter if there's a goat trail or not, we're going to build, you know.

Even if this Government of Saskatchewan has written off rural Saskatchewan, people out there in rural Saskatchewan haven't written it off. You know they were looking for anything, any incentives, but not money. They weren't looking for handouts. They were looking for to be competitive with the United States and with the rest of Canada because the industry is moving ahead. The biofuel industry is moving ahead with that, and we should be a leader and not a follower.

We've made some things. We've finally mandated ethanol fuel. We haven't mandated biodiesel; I have a private member's Bill on that. We haven't mandated that. You know, but we're always following. We follow what the other provinces are doing, and we're behind. We follow that in every industry that we've ever gone in this . . . [inaudible] . . . we're never a leader when it comes to economic development in this province.

You know another thing I looked for in this budget and the people of Watrous looked for in this budget was funding for

their hospital, for their lodge there. They've been asking for that I think for seven years. I remember the Premier's estimates last year. I asked the Premier about it and he said, you know, he said I will look at it. He said I'm going to get back to you on that. He never got back. He didn't get back to me or the people of Watrous.

I didn't expect him to get back to me, but I expected this being election year as do the people of Watrous, that they would be funding . . . We're looking at \$5 million for that. The people have raised their money. They're sitting on it. The lodge roof leaks you know, and they should fix it. But they say — what? — we fix it this year, we spend a half a million dollars of that money and then next year all of a sudden the province says we're going to build it for you. You know, then you've wasted that.

They've been waiting for six years for the government to step up. They've raised money for ten years prior to that. And now they're sitting there watching the costs, as we all know, of labour go up, of construction materials go up. So every year they've got to try to raise more money. And also they feel guilty that they're not fixing that lodge pouring money in, because they always think well next year this government is going to pay their share. We're looking at possibly \$5 million at that end of it. You know this government has \$100 million for recreation facilities but you have to apply . . . \$1 million is the minimum, you know. So that doesn't help any of my constituency.

[16:30]

I have 4,500 square miles. I have like 30 towns. None of them even qualify even close to that. Yet are their not recreation facilities important? You know this government has done nothing to help them out there in rural Saskatchewan. That's all throughout the province. Recreation is a huge component out there in rural Saskatchewan as it is in any city. Are they looking to help that? No. This government has washed their hands of rural Saskatchewan, has lost their direction.

When it comes to even the urban agenda they've even lost it. You know you talk now to the mayors. They're not happy, the big city mayors, with this particular government. Same thing, they say they won't provide them with any long-range funding so they can plan from year to year to year. This government it almost seems like we're only going to give you a little bit every year. And then if you say anything bad, we're not going to give you nothing next year. It's like the old carrot and the stick it almost seems like. Well the people are tired of it. They're tired of that. They got tired of that in rural Saskatchewan of this government years ago, but they're tired of that in the cities right now. And that's going to show at the next election. It showed in the by-elections we had coming up.

You could go on about this budget. The biggest thing is the \$700 million deficit when it comes to summary budgeting. That's what the Provincial Auditor uses. That's how people do their accounting. That's how I do it. That's how if you run any kind of a household budget, you do summary financing. That's how you determine whether you're actually losing more or spending more. There's a quote here I could pull it up, but members already have, and it's going to be pulled up again by the Finance minister that says yes we are spending more than

we're collecting. He said that in one of the talk show there. We've all got the quote, and it's going to be thrown back at him, so even he knows that he's spending more than he is collecting at this end of it.

And yet these guys will get up, this government will get up and the members will get up time after time after time and say we're running a balanced budget. Well like your Finance minister admits that yes, we're spending more than we're collecting. So it's not selling to the people and the people know that. You know you can't fool them all the time like this particular government had. They've watched this government operate for a number of years and how they've tried to start with the rainy day fund over the number of years and how they tried to work that. How it's saying that oh yes we put that money that's sitting there, until the auditor comes along.

No it's not sitting there. That's just money that we planned to put in there or may come in later through some hopefully extra oil and gas revenue — maybe, maybe not. But it's, you know, it's a figure there, but there's not actual money there. And the Provincial Auditor showed that. The people of Saskatchewan have heard that for a number of years now. So they know that this is a deficit budget.

And what's this government doing? You know, we talk about growing it. We're talking about less population. Unfortunately this last census came out; we're down again. We're down again. And what does this government do? Grows by 9 per cent. You know, you'd think that okay we're struggling along. We can't balance a budget. We can't seem to have a long-range plan. At least we've got to control our spending especially when it comes within our own means. And government, what's it do? It increases spending in government. You know, and that seems to be the only thing they know how to do, is to grow the government. Well first you have to grow the province. Then you can concentrate on growing the government to provide more services.

You know this government seems to forget that there's only so many taxpayers out there, and if you're not growing that base, you're going to lose that. That's why all our services are suffering out there from highways to health care because this government comes down . . . when it comes down to the basics, it hasn't grown.

Every other province has grown. Even Newfoundland I guess has shrunk a little bit, you know, but every other province in Saskatchewan is booming. You know, every province. Never mind the rest of the world is growing, every province is. And yet we have abundance of oil and gas and potash and uranium and tourism here. We have — and like another member pointed out — diamonds, agriculture. The biofuels industry should be leading here. And what are we doing? We're still losing population. And we're still shrinking and we're still suffering.

Well that only tells me one thing, that there is no leadership there. Sixteen years and it's shown that there's no leadership. You give these guys, you give that NDP government one more year, one more mandate and they'll have run this province . . . every term it has gone backwards. It's gone backwards in population. It has gone backwards in economic development when it comes to that. This province has been stagnant, and it is

getting worse. The rest of the country's in a boom, and we should be in a boom right now.

Is this budget going to change things around? No, it's not. It's an election budget. That's all it was. Let's spend a bunch of money and try to hit some target voters, and that is all it was for — a last ditch effort.

You know, I've heard this government constantly . . . every member gets up and every member that's going to get up now tonight is going to cry about the '80s, is going to cry about what happened. And when you've been in power for 16 years, you know what? You are what you're talking about in the '80s. You are what they are. They ran deficits in their last election. They tried to buy some votes. Did it work there? No, and it's not going to work for you.

Instead of maybe just trying to win an election, maybe you should just try for once governing this province in the right way, looking at what the rest of Canada is doing and how they're growing instead of all you think about is trying to hang on to power, cling on to it any way you can, and don't care about growing the province. But the people have recognized that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are . . . and it's going to show at the next election, whenever it is, whether it's this spring, next fall, or the spring after. It doesn't matter. Whenever it is, you're going to be gone at that and maybe then we're going to be getting this province moving in the right direction.

Agriculture, you know, no extra money. In fact if you look at the budget there's less money right now than there was last time. I can look up the figures. It's I think around \$40 million. There is less money put into agriculture this year than last year. You know, things are . . . A member just said the book is about 70 million, and yes, I don't have the exact figure, but I remember looking at it and thinking, it's less again. You've cut it back. You know, how much more can you cut back agriculture out there, you know?

And this is an industry that can help grow this province. You know, any money that you can help in agriculture comes back to you tenfold, whether it's coming back in extra spending through the, you know, through anything that a farmer buys which is huge. They spend huge amounts of money through their operation, whether it's in the local towns, in the cities, or wherever buying fuel, fertilizer, whatever. That money will come around and you know what? This government doesn't recognize that, you know. The fact is it writes off rural Saskatchewan at that end of it. So it doesn't want to spend any money, any more than the bare minimum into rural Saskatchewan. In fact all it's interested in is possibly spending money on itself, on the government. It's not even interested in even helping the people in the urban areas in the cities.

So with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can't support this budget. The people of Arm River-Watrous don't support this budget. And you know what? The people of Saskatchewan don't support this budget. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the Minister of Learning and the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Hon. Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise today and join in the debate this afternoon on our NDP government's '07-08 budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget really does go about making life better here in the province of Saskatchewan, building on our current successes and making sure that Saskatchewan citizens benefit from our booming economy. We're making this the best place in the country for young people to live, work, study, and build their futures. And we're continuing to grow our very strong economy with an emphasis on renewable green technologies. And we're increasing access, Mr. Deputy Speaker — and this is something that is very important to me — we're increasing access to health care for Saskatchewan seniors and for families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget builds on our tax cuts dedicated to making life in Saskatchewan more affordable, to further stimulate our economy and create even more jobs, and to encourage recent graduates to build their careers here. For families, we're beginning with the basics, focusing on a strong start for children at home and in school, and we're continuing to make post-secondary education and training more affordable and accessible. Health care of course remains the largest investment in our budget and we continue to address wait lists through increased testing by attracting and retaining health care professionals and by training more doctors, nurses, and other health care workers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our NDP government is building a better future for our communities and for rural residents through increased revenue sharing, property tax relief, and the largest capital budget in our history for improvements to roads and highways, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I had to have a little bit of a debate with myself here after the previous member from Arm River got up and spoke and talked about Saskatchewan never leading in anything when it comes to the biofuels. What a short memory he has, when Saskatchewan is a leader and is still a leader in the ethanol industry right across Canada with the mandating that's been done in this province. Mr. Speaker, there are many, many examples of Saskatchewan being a leader, and the member opposite should really sit down for a few days and spend some time reading and looking at the things that are taking place in the province.

Mr. Speaker, like many of the other members, first and foremost, I would truly like to thank so many in my constituency for the support that they have given. I've represented Moose Jaw Wakamow for just about eight years — seven and a half to eight years — and it truly is with support of family and friends that give very good encouragement and always understanding when family events have to be juggled and schedules keep you busy and hopping most times.

And also a thank you to friends who provide many times good advice — sometimes solicited, sometimes not — but it's always good advice that's provided.

And, Mr. Speaker, especially I would like to pass along a thank you to the staff in my office here at the legislature, but also to

the office staff in Moose Jaw. The folks that work there are very knowledgeable, very hard-working, have a great understanding of provincial programs. But also, Mr. Speaker, they have a fair understanding of federal programs too and that gives them the ability to offer help and guidance to many folks that stop by into our very busy constituency office in Moose Jaw. So a big thank you to Stacey, Ruth, and Charlene for all the help that they do.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Moose Jaw Wakamow is a urban/rural constituency that lays claim to, of course, the 15 Wing and the world-famous Snowbirds. Now Canada may see them as a national symbol, but for those of us in Moose Jaw we definitely lay claim to them, Mr. Speaker.

And also the Sukanen museum south of Moose Jaw. And I would say to anyone, when you have a chance — you can't do it in an hour or so, you've got to pretty well be able to spend the whole day there — go out and have a look at the Sukanen museum. They've spent a great deal of time really restoring and preserving a great deal of Saskatchewan history right from early pioneers up to the '60s and '70s that for some of us may argue that that's not history. We can remember that time, but it's still at the Sukanen museum. And for sure spend some time to get out there during the threshing bee in the fall. The whole village comes to life. The blacksmith is working. The steam engines are running whether they are tractors, threshers, combines. It's amazing and it's a wonderful day to go out and spend out there.

But it's a large constituency. Moose Jaw of course is our main community but we also have, within Moose Jaw Wakamow constituency, Baidon, Pasqua, Crestwynd, the Baidon Hutterite colony, Mr. Speaker, and also south to Bayard and Spring Valley. A diverse area — farm land, cattle ranching, feedlots, irrigation, Department of National Defence and Bombardier at 15 Wing and, of course, the city of Moose Jaw.

The historical city of Moose Jaw is also very evident — the tunnels, River Street, stockyards, railway, and meat packers, and grain terminals, Mr. Deputy Speaker — that it reminds us all of our roots in agriculture and as a service centre for the surrounding area. But also the new — tourism trade, the cultural centre, and with a growing retail and service sector — but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, still a very deep connection to agriculture. A city in a constituency that is diverse, beautiful, and absolutely one of the best places in Saskatchewan.

[16:45]

Mr. Speaker, we wear a number of hats as MLAs. We represent our constituents, and as a government member we also look to broader provincial concerns and take an overall approach to issues and decisions, always striving to put in place good public policy and the resources and policy that's needed to achieve that vision of making Saskatchewan the best place to work, live, and build a career.

So, Mr. Speaker, how do we gauge that vision and how do we gauge what we're accomplishing? And for many the question is, do we gauge it strictly by dollars and cents, the bottom line? Or do we gauge it solely by public opinion? And while there are many methods that we can gauge our vision and look at the work that's been accomplished and the work that's being done,

for me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I go back to the original hat I wear as the MLA for Moose Jaw Wakamow. And I ask myself, do the policies and processes we've put in place, do the initiatives in this budget, do they bring that vision to life for my constituents in Moose Jaw Wakamow? Does it make for them our province the best place to live, work, and build a career? And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer is overwhelmingly yes in so many ways.

First and foremost, I think the seniors' drug plan is a excellent addition to the services that we provide in Saskatchewan. So many on limited incomes have difficulty with the rising costs of medications, and I think this was one of the highlights for sure of our budget.

The tax exemption also for graduates to be able to build their future here in the province of Saskatchewan, and the third year of the freeze in tuition — those are all important and they are all things that we will see benefits of here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Also the implementation of year two of the business tax cuts, enabling business to expand and to create career opportunities for young people, Mr. Speaker, those are things we need to build on. Those are areas that we will continue to improve as more and more people and young people are seeing the opportunities here in our province.

And the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is providing that \$107 million in education property tax relief to Saskatchewan residents. Now the member opposite from Arm River, he said, well we're not doing anything for rural Saskatchewan. The Premier of this province recognized a year and a half ago, when he made the commitment, that there would be a credit towards agricultural property in the province of Saskatchewan of a 38 per cent tax credit on the education portion of property tax, to put in place across the province an average of that 60/40 split where the Government of Saskatchewan is covering 60 per cent of the cost of education and agricultural owners are paying 40 per cent. That is a commitment that this government and this Premier has made and that we stand by. And that is an improvement that is there because we recognized the burden that was put on agricultural land.

Maintaining the 5 per cent PST. Mr. Speaker, I think we took a few people by surprise with the 2 per cent cut in the provincial sales tax last fall, but it's been a very popular measure that everyone benefits — and I know the folks in my constituency benefit — from and they all appreciated that.

Seven point eight billion dollars in this budget in programs for Saskatchewan people — that is huge; it's absolutely huge — and all the while providing services and continuing to pay down the debt in the province of Saskatchewan.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a vital part of quality of life in Saskatchewan is access to quality health care, and that's why we're investing over 44 per cent of our budget into health care services — and that's \$3.45 billion. And it's a mind-boggling amount of money. But what we have to do is look at the services and where the enhancements are being made, and I believe that these are all things that are important, not just for my constituents, but right across the province.

Again, the seniors' drug plan. That means people 65 years and older will pay no more than \$15 for all drugs under the formulary plan. This is the single largest expansion of the drug plan since its inception and will benefit 115,000 seniors, saving them an average of \$400 a year. That's huge. And while \$400 a year to some people may not seem like a lot, for people who are living on a fixed income, this is extremely important.

And also the reduction in wait times, with 1.6 million for 160 more knee and hip replacements. I know that in Moose Jaw, at the Five Hills Health District, the number of surgeries that have been done over the last few years has continued to increase as we have picked up some surgeries from Regina. But we've also been able to reduce the wait times in Moose Jaw and in the Five Hills area and provide that valuable service. Five Hills has done a wonderful job. Actually it's great to see additional money going in this direction, and I know that it will be put to good use and people will see and feel the results.

We're providing over 3,117 more MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging], 5,455 bone mineral density scans, and providing \$79 million in funding to the cancer agency. These are all important.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's interesting when the . . . It's interesting to see when we release the budget — all the hours you put in, all the work you put in — to sit back and listen to the Minister of Finance present the budget. And it comes together so nicely and really covers a broad spectrum of issues in the province of Saskatchewan. And I know when you can sit there and listen and know that we've done a good job and put together a budget spending billions of dollars, but it's interesting to see the pieces that really grab people's imagination and grab their interest.

You know, we've seen some discussion and seen some polling previously where grandparents in the province of Saskatchewan are worried about their grandchildren — what they're going to do, how they're going to be able to find jobs, how they're going to be able to . . . or where they're going to be able to put down their roots. Grandparents are worried about their grandchildren. And in many cases grandchildren are worried about their grandparents maybe living on their own — where they're going to live, the kind of supports that they will have in their later years. And it's, I think speaks highly of Saskatchewan and that community spirit and the concern for others and that deep family connection that's there.

And I think this is partly the reason why the dental sealant program from grades 1 to 7 in community schools has really grabbed people's attention, because it speaks to the things that we value. It speaks to prevention in many cases. And I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one area that you have often spoke about, that there's more we can do on the prevention side. Instead of always waiting or waiting until we treat a disease or an illness, that we need to move in this area in many different ways. And this is a beginning I think that really showed the people of Saskatchewan that we believe in these areas and we know that this is the direction that we need to take.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other areas that we could talk about. And this truly is a wonderful budget and I would say to folks at home, if you have access to Internet here in this highly wired province of Saskatchewan, sit down and have a look

online at the various initiatives that are contained in the budget. If not, there's paper copies that are out and I'm sure the Minister of Finance has sent out a number of the hard copies, and you can look at the areas that are important to you.

But there is a couple things that I would like to talk about that are near and dear to me and are important to me, and just to touch on those before I run out time. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan truly has so much to offer and — especially when it comes to affordable living — and I'm very proud that, as promised and as committed, Saskatchewan still has the lowest cost utility bundle anywhere in Canada and the lowest overall household charges and taxes in comparison to other provinces.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the opposition never talks about that. But there in the budget every year is that comparison of household charges, compares Saskatchewan to other provinces, cities of similar size, right across Canada. That's what the people have to look at. You can look at the numbers. You can do the comparisons yourself. And in fact we do have the lowest cost. So people really need to look at those things.

The tax reductions since 2000-2001 amount to \$650 million saved by the people of Saskatchewan. They have made our province not only the most affordable place to live and raise a family, but also to invest and do business. And, Mr. Speaker, we have seen our economy creating jobs — 21,000. It's just phenomenal the numbers, year over year, how the numbers have increased. And we will only continue to see things improve and those numbers continue to grow because our economy truly is on a roll.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is important for me to talk about, and that I really want to address some comments to, is this NDP government's commitment to continuing to move ahead with our blended early learning and child care plan. Now even after there were changes announced by the federal government, and we're not going to get into that, but this government made the commitment that while our movement on the child care plan may be slowed down because of the restriction of funding and the funding had been withdrawn, that we believed that this was important, that we had put together a plan of early learning and child care that was appropriate. The stakeholders in Saskatchewan felt that it covered the issues that were important to Saskatchewan people, and that while it may be curtailed and a little bit slowed down, that this was the plan and we would continue to move ahead in this area of early learning and child care.

And, Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased. I just about gave the Minister of Finance a standing ovation. But a standing ovation of one may not get . . . I'm sure there would have been others that would have joined in, Mr. Speaker, to see in our '07-08 budget \$11.6 million in new funding for child care.

Now the member is hollering across the floor at me, and I truly hope that the member opposite has really moved away from some of his old comments. And we'll all remember how he talked about women don't like conflict and they stay at home. They aren't interested in politics. I hope he's seen the error of his ways and now realizes that Saskatchewan has one of the highest attachments of women in the workforce.

So if we have labour shortages, we want to continue increasing those numbers, and women continue to choose to join the labour force. We need to have the support of the early learning and child care spaces. So this budget will give us an additional 500 seats that will give us a total of 9,300 child care spaces, and that's an increase of 5.7 per cent. It's a good increase, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am still excited over this budget when I look at the whole piece for early learning.

This investment will also introduce the first ever ongoing capital funding program for the maintenance and renovation of existing child care spaces and the development of new spaces, something new in Saskatchewan, and I know it will be well received.

This budget will also supplement the purchase of healthy meals and snacks through a nutrition grant. We need to make sure that those littlest citizens of Saskatchewan have that good start on each and every day.

This budget will also meet our prior commitments for child care worker wage lifts, an area where we know there was difficulty in recruiting and retaining the trained early child care workers, and this will help to address that. This funding also adds 15 new pre-kindergarten programs to our system, which adds a total of 134 programs in Saskatchewan.

It also provides a variety of other supports for parents, licensed family child care homes, and the ELCC [early learning and child care] sector at large — increasing tuition reimbursements for workers, enhanced accessibility grants, and teen supports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is so much we could talk about, and I see that the clock is winding down here. We still haven't talked about the improvements to education. There are many things, and I'm sure that somewhere along the line that we will have more opportunity to get up and talk about all the wonderful things in this budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to be part of the budget-making process and to see the plans implemented. And I look forward to supporting the motion and the budget of this New Democratic government. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'd move the House do now recess until 7 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — It's been moved by the Deputy House Leader that the House recess until 7 p.m. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — That is carried. This House stands recessed until 7 p.m. this evening.

[The Assembly recessed until 19:00.]

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Minister Responsible for Seniors

Hon. Pat Atkinson
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Minister Responsible for Immigration
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