



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



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Morgan, Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, Hon. John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
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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 resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

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, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Cheveldayoff.]

The Speaker: — Order. Debate resumes on the special order of the motion by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the Minister of Public Service Commission:

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

And the amendment to the main motion 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.

The Chair recognizes the member for Wood River.

Mr. Huyghebaert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased this evening to stand and actually debate deficit 2007. And one of the things, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to start with is congratulating our newest member from Martensville. I think the outstanding win and the dramatic win of 77 per cent plurality in the Martensville by-election is kind of indicative of what this budget is all about: the people of the province realize that the NDP [New Democratic Party] have betrayed them once again. And at the polls it’s showing up.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is just, it’s mind-boggling . . . The documents that are presented to us on budget day are presented by the government of the day, which happens to be the NDP. And yet members on the other side, the members opposite will stand up one after the another and tout about the balanced budget. This is in their own document. I don’t know if the people have a hard time reading over there, or if they’re really just trying to put a spin on for themselves. The people of the province are not buying it. But each one will stand up over there and they will say, they will say, it’s a balanced budget.

In their own document on page 58: \$8.049 billion estimated 2006; 8.751, 2007-08. That is a \$701 million deficit. It doesn’t matter how they want to spin it on that side of the House. It is a

deficit. If you take in, you spend more money than you take in, it is called a deficit.

And it was very interesting to hear the Minister of Agriculture yip from his seat because he talked about the actual revenues for, or the money for agriculture going up too. This seems to be another little problem with the people on that side of the House, understanding their own document. \$369 million forecast for 2006-2007; estimated for 2007-2008, 301. Mr. Speaker, that’s a \$68 million deficit in the agricultural budget and yet people on the other side have the audacity to stand up and say, we’re putting more money into it.

They cannot even read and understand their own document. No wonder, no wonder the commentary that’s coming out is very, very much enlightening the people on that side of the House as to what is really contained in this budget — even the Minister of Finance himself. Now I don’t know if his colleagues on that side of the House are even listening to the minister, but when the minister actually says — he actually says this in an interview — well it’s a surplus actually on GRF [General Revenue Fund] but on the summary financial it is a deficit.

Now how can they stand up and say it’s a balanced budget when even the Minister of Finance is calling it a deficit budget? The NDP have really blown the boom. We were in a boom, according to them, and now it is totally blown. They’ve gone on a reckless spending spree, maximum spending, the most spending that’s ever been done in the province. They talk about, oh boy, look how much we’re spending. But if you’re spending in a deficit situation I don’t think it’s very beneficial to the people of the province of Saskatchewan — a \$700 million deficit.

Now what do we have to show for it? Are people better off? Are the waiting lists shorter? Are the highways getting better? Mr. Speaker, the answer to all of those is no. Yet the government’s got bigger. Isn’t it ironic? Here we have people on that side of the House standing up and saying, oh how good this budget is for Saskatchewan; the people really think this is a great budget. But we’ve got less people in the province. Since the current Premier took office we’ve got 10,000 fewer people in the province — 10,000 fewer. That’s 10,000 less taxpayers, most likely. And yet we’re on a more spending spree.

But we did grow something in this province. We grew the government — 1,459 more government positions since the current Premier took office.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about how this budget deals with issues and concerns around the province. The people on that side that operate with blinders, I think have to come to a realization that there are other people in this province. There’s people that live in the rural areas. There’s people that live in urban areas that have issues and problems. These people walk around with huge blinders on, oblivious to what the issues and the problems are in this province. And they’re more tunnelled into, how can we buy a vote?

I think they should start listening to the people of the province. I’m going to give you an example. One is the southwest drought disaster that’s going on. How many times have these people

came to the legislature? How many times have they talked to the Minister of Agriculture, pleading, pleading for help? Not only just help, Mr. Speaker. They are pleading for fairness — fairness. And I think we've heard in this Assembly numerous times, the people that had the disaster situation in the Northeast, the flooding, received \$25 an acre — 15 from the federal government, 10 from the province.

The Southwest is hit with a drought two years in a row, sometimes three in some places. And what does this government stand up and do for them? Absolutely nothing. Nothing. It is a shame. It is a shame. They cannot even be fair within the province of Saskatchewan. They should be totally ashamed of that. Are they? No. No, they didn't think they were going to buy many votes down in that area anyway.

What has this budget done to grow the province? Just look through that budget document as one of my colleagues did earlier. He went through it. If anybody on that side of the House can point out what this has actually done to grow the province, I don't mean grow government, I mean grow the province.

And I want to talk about, which I do on throne speeches and budget speeches over the last number of years and I wish to use an example: still, after all of these years, we still ship 750,000 head of cattle out of this province to Alberta to be fed. Where do they get the grain and the barley to feed these cattle? From Saskatchewan, the biggest part of it. Where do they get the young men and women to feed this resource to the cattle? Out of Saskatchewan. Three resources, three valuable resources we ship from this province: 750,000 head of cattle, the barley, and the young men and women. And can anybody on that side of the House stand up and say this is right? Why would it be right?

Oh sure, we have Mr. SPUDCO saying it's right. He has the potatoes going out of the province maybe. Oh no, no, they're gone now. So is the \$35 million gone — 35 million in SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company] which was a very bad investment. He knows it. So do people on that side of the House know it.

But was there anything in this budget, was there anything in this budget to help retain the 750,000 head of cattle we ship out? Does anybody think that's an issue and a problem? Let me suggest, Mr. Speaker, that if we had those three valuable resources in this province to provide some value-added industry in agriculture, there would be people coming back. There would be people working here.

I want to continue on the cattle issue also because one of the things that has happened in my area, we do have a feedlot that started up. We have a feedlot that started up. But I want to tell you how business friendly this NDP socialist government is. When they started this feedlot, they were phoning me on a regular basis with issues, problems in establishing a business in this province. Do you know who the problems were with? The government and government agencies. If it wasn't SaskTel, it was Sask Highways, SaskWater, Sask Environment.

There are stories that were just absolutely unbelievable. We even had the NDP explaining to the feedlot operators down in my area that started the feedlot, that water rolled uphill. And this had to come about from the NDP because they would not

give a sanction to the feedlot until the high side of the feedlot was bermed. Well that's the first I'd ever heard of water rolling uphill. Only, only from the NDP government could this possibly happen.

Let's talk about the value-added and the lack thereof. If we had a business-friendly organization from that side of the House that would do something for business, what about value-added? Even in those 750,000 head of cattle that I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, 750,000 head of cattle, would we not need, would we not need some value-added industry in the cattle business like maybe a feedlot, maybe a feed processing plant?

Oh boy, they don't want to see that, because you know what? That would give entrepreneurial jobs in the province and they don't want to see entrepreneurial jobs. The reason is because entrepreneurs aren't normally socialists and they're not going to support that group of men and women over there. So why can't we do something in this province in a budget? The minister had an ideal situation to promote something in the budget to value-added industry. My colleague talked about biofuel and ethanol. Nothing in there. Now wouldn't that be something that would be kind of nice to put a business-friendly clause or two in the budget to add some value-added to our industries?

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk a little bit about the rural areas and the problems that they're facing with the lack of vision that these men and women have over there — a lack of vision.

We talk about health care. We talk that it's so good, this health care. They talk about how great it is. Well we do have issues in health care. We know hospitals that have been closed. Every year it seems like something else is closing. They'll nickel and dime a facility. And the one recently in my area . . . and it's very, very cautious of how they do this. They sent out one of the board of directors to the workers of the facility and said, we're going to close you; we're closing you out. When they called me, I said, give me a copy of their letter. Oh, we won't send a letter because if we send a letter it can be used against us.

[19:15]

So I want to read a letter into the record, Mr. Speaker, from one of the people that work at this hospital:

I am writing to let you know how disappointed we are feeling in Lafleche since we heard that Five Hills Health Region is planning on closing our Lab in the Health [Care] Centre in Lafleche.

They're starting to get a little quiet on that side of the House. Maybe they are listening, and they do realize that stuff is happening out there even if they don't know about it:

This closure will have a HUGE impact on the residents in this town and will mean a big imposition on all of its residents. I live with my 88 year old Mother who uses these services a great deal. Does this mean that we will have to go to Gravelbourg to have this service at our disposal?

And the minister thinks it's funny that somebody 88 years old

would have to go a long ways to have some health care. I don't think it's funny. When you live in rural Saskatchewan, it is definitely not funny to have to travel an extended distance, as an 88-year-old, to have some lab work done:

Is this the first of many nails in the coffin of Health care in this town? Will the doctor be next to leave . . .

And speaking to the medical people down there, if the lab closes, what keeps the doctor there? And the doctor's there only part-time now. So if the lab closes, he really doesn't have a reason to be there. So that could spell the next step, is the doctor leaving:

Will the doctor be next to leave and when no prescriptions are needed to be filled in this town then will it be our druggist that needs to leave? And what about our Health [Care] Centre here, which serves as a long-term care facility. Is it also on the chopping blocks to be eliminated from the system soon [by the NDP government]?

I implore you to send this message to the people who are making these decisions . . .

Well I don't think it should go to the people making the decisions because the decision makers on that side of the House are just thumping rural Saskatchewan:

We ARE as important as the city folk who have these services at their fingertips . . . [at all times].

We need this Lab service left intact in our town and want you to take this up with those who try to make the decisions for those of us in the outlying districts . . . from the cities.

Mr. Speaker, that's an example of what this NDP government thinks of rural Saskatchewan, what it thinks of health care in rural Saskatchewan. We know the hospitals that have closed. They've closed a couple more last year. They're getting doctors away. We've known where there are signs, signs on hospitals that say our health facility's closed. We're lacking nurses. We don't have doctors. Do they care on that side of the House? Not one little bit.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the destruction of rural Saskatchewan, the betrayal of rural Saskatchewan by this NDP government, it is absolutely amazing.

I'd also like to talk, touch base on the schools. This is the next step — school closures. Well are they really going to look at anything and address the school closures, the proposed school closures? The minister says there isn't 52. There's only 39 plus 11 plus 4 or something like that, what actually adds up to more than 52. One is this year. One is next year. I don't even know if she knows how many schools are really being planned on being closed. I know there's some in my constituency and there's some in the area.

Now how much thought was given to this whole school closure? We know that they betrayed the people on the property tax promise. Betrayal on promises is old hat for these people — back from promising tax reductions in the last election to

actually raising taxes — and there is a list of betrayals.

But on the schools, where was the negotiations going on with these schools? And I go back to when the Finance minister was minister of Education or he attempted to be minister of Education, talked about the amalgamation, forced amalgamation of school districts and how this was going to be so much better. Well, is it? Was it?

Where is the tax savings? He actually said the money saved from the amalgamation of health districts would go to the saving education portion of property tax. Well I think if he looks at his budget — and if you can believe, if you can believe what's in there — you'll find that it cost money to amalgamate the school divisions. And now we're getting to the point where schools are closing. They say oh we don't control that. I don't know what they control from that side of the House, but the fact is there's schools that are on the chopping block. And it's not fair to the communities. It's not fair to the people that are involved. And why won't they listen to a proposal about having a school of opportunity or a school of necessity?

How far do any of those people on that side of the House want our children to ride a school bus? With classes and school bus, is 10 hours a day acceptable or 11 hours a day? We know people right now that are riding the school bus for quite a long period of time, and you start closing these schools, it's going to be longer.

Mr. Speaker, highways, highways are absolutely deplorable. Now we've got school buses going over highways. And if they close schools, it's going to be for a longer distance, and it's actually atrocious. I can't believe, I can't believe the lack of effort on the part of the people on that side of the House to do anything.

Mr. Speaker, I could talk for another hour, but I guess we're limited in time. So I just want to close by advising the members on that side of the House, they can spend all the money they want in trying to buy votes, but I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, there's not one of them there, no matter how many dollars they wish to spend, they can't buy imagination — they can't. They can spend all the money they want trying to buy votes, but I'll tell everyone of them they cannot buy credibility. And, Mr. Speaker, they can spend all the money they want on votes but I can assure you they cannot buy integrity.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment to the budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Minister of Justice, the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today, this evening and speak to the budget for 2007-2008 and for the government motion in support of that budget, Mr. Speaker.

This is a budget that works at keeping Saskatchewan strong. This is a budget that works on building on the prosperity of this province, building prosperity with a purpose. This is a budget that works to make this Saskatchewan the best place to live,

work, and raise a family in Canada.

And in respect to making it the best place to live in Canada, there is a substantial commitment in this budget on the part of this government, on the part of this NDP government to improve the health care system in this province. There is, in the budget, funding for access and wait-time strategies, for new initiatives to reduce wait times including up to 160 additional hip and knee surgeries per year; 3,117 additional MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] scans per year; 5,455 additional bone mineral density tests per year; and improved patient scheduling, remote patient monitoring, and the cath lab in Saskatoon. The budget continues to provide \$8.9 million to address high priority wait-list capacity and surgical management issues in order to reduce wait times.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, there is, in this budget, new money for the recruitment and training of health care professionals. And what have we heard from the opposition in respect to health care funding? The Saskatchewan Party opposition would cut, would cut funding, would cut funding to health care. The Saskatchewan Party opposition would fund programs out of efficiencies. They're sending in the accountants and the auditors.

Now this is a cover, Mr. Speaker, from an opposition that has said they will put no new money into health care because the Saskatchewan health care system, when you look at the proportion of administration costs to services provided, is one of the most efficient if not the most efficient health care system on the continent, Mr. Speaker. There is no money to be found in efficiencies, Mr. Speaker, and the opposition come close to being honest, come close to integrity when they say — as they have said in respect to this budget — they would cut the health care spending in this budget, Mr. Speaker. And specifically what they would cut, Mr. Speaker, is the seniors' drug plan.

Now drugs are increasing in price at approximately 13 per cent per year, Mr. Speaker, way above, way above general inflation. Eighty-seven per cent of seniors have a drug prescription that costs \$15 or more. Mr. Speaker, the enhanced seniors' drug program, which the opposition has opposed, which they have said they would cut, will provide a cap on that \$15 drug cost starting July 1, 2007. This will benefit approximately 115,000 senior citizens in the province of Saskatchewan and an average benefit to them of \$400 a year.

And I want to make an argument because the opposition, both inside this House and outside the House, have argued against the universality of this program, Mr. Speaker. And a program that applies to every senior citizen, Mr. Speaker, today is much more likely to apply to every senior citizen tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. A program that is means tested as the opposition has suggested and will apply we don't know to who they think is worthy of this program, who will be covered by it, but the number will shrink, Mr. Speaker. The number will shrink either because of inflation or the number will shrink because of program redesign. And if the program is to be affected and if it's to be a basis for an expanded drug program, Mr. Speaker, it has to be as we have designed it — a program that applies for every senior citizen, for every prescription on the drug plan over \$15.

But this budget's also designed to help fulfill our commitment to make Saskatchewan the best place to work in, Saskatchewan. And at the centre of that is the graduate tax exemption, Mr. Speaker, the graduate tax exemption which will provide a \$10,000 deduction for all graduates — not just university graduates but graduates into trades — who start their careers in Saskatchewan for those five years, those first five years while they start their careers, start their homes, start their families in Saskatchewan, sheltering the first \$20,000 of their income, Mr. Speaker.

Now Saskatchewan, it's almost certainly the most affordable place to start your career, start your family in this country. We have a labour shortage, there are more jobs than people. Certainly the lowest insurance, car insurance rates for young people in the country. An insurance company, a Crown corporation that is sending a rebate out to drivers in the province. Housing is relatively low. The government has made a commitment to the lowest priced utility bundle in the country and has kept that commitment. So certainly on a wide front, a place where there is much opportunity for employment and an affordable place to live. And now, now for young people, now for recent graduates for the first five years of their working life, no tax advantage to moving to Alberta whatsoever, Mr. Speaker, with the graduate tax exemption. And why the opposition opposes this particular plan, I don't know. I understand their philosophical opposition to the seniors' drug plan, Mr. Speaker, but why they oppose this plan, I'm not so sure — but I'll return to that.

And we are also committed to making Saskatchewan the best place to raise a family, Mr. Speaker. And this budget adds 500 new child care spaces. It adds 15 new pre-kindergarten programs from vulnerable children in the province of Saskatchewan. It makes possible dental sealants for students, two grades in the community schools in the province. And I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, that the dental sealant program is a modest part of the government programming in this budget — a very modest part. It will have a significant effect on the lives of those children and their future dental health, but it's a modestly cost program, and the opposition to this program to me seems particularly surprising and particularly mean-spirited. I have one comment here talking about not benefiting very many people, and I guess you can understand the circles that that commentator travels in, and his opposition to this program seemed to me particularly mean-spirited.

And this budget also continues the freezing of undergraduate tuition at universities for a third year, 2004-2005 levels.

[19:30]

So the argument that this budget doesn't address the concerns of the average family . . . well I suppose perhaps not the average family without a grandparent, without a child, without a student. Perhaps if we can find such an average family, perhaps the deepening of the property tax rebate, the money being spent on highways and making economic development possible, and improving economic development across the province, none of these things will affect, in the view of the opposition, or benefit average families.

So as I said, I understand the opposition of the Saskatchewan

Party opposite to the seniors' drug plan. I mean they're philosophically opposed to it. I appreciate that. And they have other priorities. I appreciate that, although I would appreciate them coming clean on what those other priorities are. I understand their opposition to the minimum wage. I understand to a certain extent the member from Silver Springs, Finance critic, when he says the minimum wage, who does that benefit? His infamous words. I understand that. They're philosophically opposed to the minimum wage. I can understand that too. And I understand their opposition to Family Day which John Gormley, the voice of the Saskatchewan Party, called churlish, called churlish their opposition to Family Day. But I understand their opposition to that as well, Mr. Speaker. That again is philosophical.

But there are two positions that the Saskatchewan Party have taken, Mr. Speaker, that I have difficulty understanding. One is the claim or the proposition made by the Finance critic, the member from Saskatoon Silver Springs, that the SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] rebate should be clawed back and paid into the General Revenue Fund. That was a dandy.

This is both unlawful and unfair. The surplus in the Auto Fund belongs to the drivers of the province and needs to be returned to them, and Saskatchewan Government Insurance is doing that. And this idea that somehow this is taxpayer money and could go into the General Revenue Fund and fund other programs is almost as silly a proposition as the Finance critic's proposition that we take the PST [provincial sales tax] off groceries which they've never been on. And it's this misunderstanding of what the PST applies to and what the Auto Fund is all about that really makes one wonder about the criticism of the lead critic on the budget from the opposition.

The idea that the SGI . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Why is the member from Regina Rosemont on her feet?

Ms. Crofford: — Yes, I just wanted to see, Mr. Speaker, if the member could keep his flow. But no . . . With leave to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member for Regina Rosemont wishes to make introductions. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Leave has been granted. The Chair recognizes the member for Regina Rosemont.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Ms. Crofford: — Well imagine how surprised I was, Mr. Speaker, to look up in your gallery and see one of our Cathedral Arts Festival committee members, GerriAnn Siwek, sitting in the gallery tonight. So I'll just ask the Assembly to join me in welcoming GerriAnn. She's an artist and has for many years worked at SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] as well.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Cheveldayoff.]

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

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The idea that the opposition had that they would expropriate the money being paid to Saskatchewan drivers from the Auto Fund — and is in any case their money, whether it's paid in rebate or kept as a surplus — that they would expropriate this and put this into the General Revenue Fund is an idea that actually I don't think even ever occurred to the Devine administration, Mr. Speaker.

When they equity stripped SaskPower and they equity stripped SaskEnergy, they did . . . I don't think it ever occurred to them to actually take money from the Auto Fund and pay it into the General Revenue Fund to finance any project or any program. And so this is, I would say, for the opposition, a new low, a new low on how to misuse the Crowns to finance the province. And this suggestion, I think, actually makes the suggestion about taking the PST [provincial sales tax] off groceries — where it's never been — almost sound sensible on the part of the Finance critic from the opposition.

The second position of the opposition that I don't understand . . . And as I said, I understand why they're opposed to the seniors' drug plan. I don't agree with them, but I understand why they're opposed to that. I understand where they're coming from when they oppose a minimum wage. I don't agree with them but I understand that. And I kind of understand where they are coming from when they opposed Family Day. I didn't agree with them but I sort of understood that.

But I don't understand their opposition to the graduate tax exemption, Mr. Speaker, and their possible support for an alternative that would be tied to tuition and the amount of tuition paid. And the rebate would be there. I don't understand why that opposition would put up as an alternative a program biased against the trades. I don't understand in this province with this skill shortage, this labour shortage around skills, why they would oppose a program that is neutral as to whether you graduated from university or trades and rewards you for your contribution, post-graduation, to the economy of the province of Saskatchewan. I don't know why they would oppose that and raise as an alternative something biased towards university graduates and against graduates in the trades. What hole in the economy do they think they're trying to fill? Why this bias against graduates in the trades? Why not support a program that's neutral in that respect?

I understand some of their other oppositions. As I said, I don't agree with them. But I don't understand that one, and I wonder

if that isn't just knee-jerk opposition. The government has come up with a program aimed at recruiting and retaining young people — graduates from post-secondary education whether they're graduates from the universities, graduates from the trades. And because the Government of Saskatchewan has come up with it, we're going to oppose it, and for no other reason that they could possibly give because, as we have said on occasion — but I guess it bears repeating — on this side of the House we are working for the people of Saskatchewan. And that side of the House — and this shows it more clearly than anything else because this is not a philosophical difference — on that side of the House, they're working for the Saskatchewan Party.

And that's a key difference in this House. And that's a key difference on the stance on the programs in this budget. That's a key difference for the difference of opinion on the seniors' drug plan and the difference of opinion on the graduate tax credit. That is the key difference here.

And whether the benefits of the prosperity of this province are going to be shared with the people of this province as this government proposes or not, that is what this motion before this House is about. And it's clear what side the government is on. And it's pretty clear what side the opposition is on — and that is their side and their side alone, Mr. Speaker.

I said at the beginning and I'll say it now, this is a budget that is designed to keep Saskatchewan strong. This is a budget that wants to make this . . . that shows the government's desire to make this the best place to live, work, and raise a family. This is a budget that wants to build on the prosperity of this province with purpose.

Since this NDP government came to power, Saskatchewan has been brought from the brink of bankruptcy to boom times.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Quennell: — Having now arrived at this time of prosperity, we need to share. We need to be fair. We need to build on that prosperity with a purpose. We need to keep this province strong. We need to keep this province and make this province even more the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. This budget does that, Mr. Speaker. I support this budget. I oppose the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is so pleased with this budget that they have presented, and you can hear it from the members opposite, from their speeches and from their applauding. And on budget day, how pleased were they with their budget?

Well, Mr. Speaker, in the budget books there are . . . They are two great big books, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of pages. And every year the government, out in the rotunda on budget day, provides the public with copies of the budget books. And you know, all the different organizations like SARM [Saskatchewan

Association of Rural Municipalities] and SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] and the school boards and the municipalities and the various associations come into the legislature, do their penance by sitting and listening to the Finance minister and the Finance critic for the opposition. They all dutifully sit here doing their penance and listening to it so that they can get a copy of the budget book and see what's in it for them.

Well this year the government was so pleased with the budget that they gave them a baseball card. This was it. This was all that was presented to the public to view what was in the budget. There were no books available out there for the public to purview. There was no information on how much money was going to be in Highways or Agriculture or Learning or Health or any of the other, Mr. Speaker, any of the other departments. They had no information.

The public was not given access to the information on how much money the government was taking in, in taxes. They weren't given the information unless they had a very good memory and listened very carefully to the Finance minister. They didn't leave this building on budget day with the information, other than the little baseball card, Mr. Speaker. So I think it's incumbent on the members of the House on both sides to lay out the facts as to what was in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, the budget this year comprised of the largest amount of money this province has ever spent in a budget, \$8.3 billion — \$8.3 billion. That's a huge amount of money. Well more than \$8,300 for every man, woman, and child because we've slipped below that magic million people in the province — what are we down to? — 968,000, something like that, the lowest it's been in the last 10 to 15 years, Mr. Speaker. So we're probably looking at an average of \$8,500 of spending for every man, woman, and child. So when you stop and think about it, you have to realize that the NDP used to brag about free medicare in Saskatchewan. Well at 83 to \$8,500 a person, you'd hardly call it free.

But what did come out of this budget and what the public didn't get the opportunity to review closely, because they didn't get the budget books, was the fact that there was only \$7.8 billion worth of revenues. We have a shortfall.

Now the Finance minister stands up and says, 14th consecutive year of balanced budgets. Except it ain't so, Mr. Speaker. He had to take money from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to try and top it up.

Now ever since the Finance minister . . . Two Finance ministers ago, the member from Saskatoon Massey Place thought up the idea of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. There actually never was any money in it. It was simply a paper shuffle. We'll put down the fact that Liquor and Gaming has some money, so we'll stick it into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. And zoom, out it goes right away. So it's like having a hole in your pocket. You put a nickel in your pocket, and it's gone out the bottom. But theoretically, you've got a nickel in your pocket.

Well there was no nickel, except until last year, Mr. Speaker. Last year, the Finance minister decides he's actually going to put some money in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. So he put in

somewhere in the neighbourhood of 7 to \$800 million.

So what does he do this year? Well it was supposed to be the rainy day fund. It was the fund that was supposed to be there to stabilize the province's financial budget in times of need. Well the province is actually doing reasonably well. I'll talk about that later. But the province is doing reasonably well. So where's the rainy day? Where is the problem that we needed to dip into the Fiscal Stabilization Fund?

The problem was in the polls, Mr. Speaker — not in the economy, not in the operations of government. It was in the NDP's political polling. And so the Finance minister drew out 500-plus million dollars to bolster up the NDP's polls rather than to use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund for what the member from Saskatoon Massey Place originally said it was for, was to help stabilize the province's economy in a time of need.

[19:45]

And as my colleague said, supposed to bolster up their flagging poll numbers. And you must think after listening to the members today in the House and question period, and listening to their debate here today, that those polling numbers musn't be doing what they wanted them to do. They must not be getting the bounce out of it. Because they were busy today talking about how the deficit is not really a deficit rather than bragging about, supposedly, all the good things that are in the budget. So they're busy trying to counter what the public is seeing as the truth, is that there is a real deficit again in Saskatchewan. And it's not the first time under this government. They have been talking about the 14 years of deficit, of no deficits when in fact there's been 7 of the last 15 years have been in a deficit position.

Now they move money in and out of the budget so that the GRF, the General Revenue Fund, shows that it's in a good position. But it's like going to your bank and having a line of credit. As long as the banker keeps putting a little bit of money into your chequing account, you're not in arrears in your chequing account but that line of credit keeps getting bigger and bigger every time. And that's what's happening in the province of Saskatchewan.

In fact, our line of credit is now over \$11 billion again and that's not even counting the unfunded pension liabilities, Mr. Speaker, not even counting those which are another \$4.3 billion. So we're looking at almost \$16 billion of debt. And one of my colleagues pointed out to me that the last Provincial Auditor's report showed the debt to be almost \$21 billion. So I didn't ask him where the extra 5 came from in there but according to the budget books here it's almost \$16 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, there is some serious deficits occurring in this province.

Now the previous member was talking about equity stripping and that raised an issue for me with the Crowns. We see the Crown corporations turning over dividends to CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan] which in turn then pass it on to the provincial government. And this year CIC is passing on to the General Revenue Fund \$200 million. But where is the money coming from?

Well how's this? SaskEnergy dividend is going to be 6.9 million — 6.9 million, that's a significant amount of money. Any one of us in here — well except perhaps for the Minister of Justice being a lawyer — is a lot of money. But SaskEnergy turned around and is borrowing 70.2 million. So they're borrowing 70.2 million to pay a \$6.9 million dividend. SaskPower is paying the government a \$135 million dividend and is borrowing \$475 million — three times as much. SaskTel paid a dividend of 61.4 million and is borrowing more than 146 million.

Well maybe the Crowns need this money for projects, etc. But why not let the Crown, the individual Crown, keep the money that they have generated to pay for those projects rather than giving the money to the government for whatever black hole the government wants to put it into and then turn around and borrow and pay interest on that money? Surely the Crown should be able to keep that money themselves and then incur less interest debt and build up less debt.

When that happens, when that happens, Mr. Speaker, when you take the money to pay a dividend and then borrow actually to pay it, you're equity stripping. You're stripping the equity out of that corporation and that's exactly what the Minister of Justice was talking about it and his government is doing exactly that, Mr. Speaker.

You know, Mr. Speaker, even though the government didn't want to let the public have the full budget books and simply gave them the baseball card, you would think that — if you listen to the members opposite — that they're quite happy with this budget. They're pleased with it. They think this is a budget to go to the people with. So I say to them, Mr. Speaker, if they actually believe that this is the budget to go to the people with, why don't they just do so?

You know, we'll wait until the budget debate is over and that vote happens and then they can go to the polls. You know, if they believe that this is the budget that is to take to the people of Saskatchewan on an election year, then let's get down to it. Let's get to it, Mr. Speaker. I'm prepared to face the election and my colleagues are prepared to face the electorate, so why doesn't the Premier, why isn't the Premier ready to face the electorate? So I challenge him. Once the budget, this budget vote has happened, why doesn't he go to the people? Why doesn't he show the confidence that his Finance, the bravado that his Finance minister is showing and go to the people, Mr. Speaker?

Well maybe the reason they're not talking about doing this is if you look back at previous elections, Mr. Speaker. You look back at the 2003 election. Just before that election, the government went out and signed an agreement with a number of the unions associated with government, associated with the third entity such as the health districts, called joint job evaluation. And it was hastily done. They promised signing bonuses of \$1,000, Mr. Speaker. And all of that, they went around the province saying, if the Sask Party gets elected, they're going to cancel that program.

Well, Mr. Speaker, once the election was over, I know that out at ISC [Information Services Corporation of Saskatchewan] that I believe it was 43 employees were fired three days after the

election by this government. It turns out the joint job evaluations, they still had 18 months of negotiations to do with the unions after the election, and then they turned around and sent notices back to many employees, in particular those in the health industries, demanding that the \$1,000 signing bonuses be returned, that that was not part of the collective bargaining agreement and they weren't entitled to it.

I know a number of the health care workers in my region received those letters and I know my colleagues had a number of people in their area that had received those letters. So just because the government put something in the budget, just because the government has promised it, doesn't mean this government is going to deliver it.

So when you take a look at the seniors' drug program that's being talked about, just because the government has said it's going to be \$15 a prescription, at the end of the day it doesn't necessarily mean that's going to be the case. For one thing, a good many seniors are already covered under various programs. It also means, Mr. Speaker, that some of the drugs that the seniors use aren't on the formulary, so they're going to have to pay for them anyways. And if a doctor is prescribing a drug for a patient, a senior, that the health department isn't sure it does any good, they don't fund it in that case either. So there's a good many seniors out there, Mr. Speaker, no matter what this government is saying about the drug program, are not going to receive any benefits out of it at all.

When I stop and think back, the NDP were very strong on the idea of clawing back CPP [Canada Pension Plan] payments to people who earn over a certain amount of money. And this would've been back about eight, ten years ago, they demanded and got that the level be set at \$75,000 — that if you earned more than \$75,000 as a senior, your entire CPP was clawed back. And yet this government is proposing not to do that with the drug program, that it doesn't matter what your income level is, you're entitled to \$15 a prescription.

I can remember back in the '80s the member from Saskatoon Nutana saying that, if a person had to pay \$125 a year for drugs, that you were forcing them to choose between their drug program and food. Well, Mr. Speaker, it was that member and the government she represents that raised that deductible level up to \$1,700 a year and then changed it to 3.4 per cent of their gross income and now, just in time for an election, wants to roll it back to \$15 a prescription for those who don't qualify for any of the additional programs.

I just don't have any confidence — and neither do most of the people of this province — that after the election that this program will survive under the NDP. Because everybody we have talked to, Mr. Speaker, says that this is an unsustainable program.

I think back to the 2003 election when the government said under the Boughen report there is lots of room in the fiscal capacity of Saskatchewan to deal with the property tax issues and to reduce PST.

Well, Mr. Speaker, what they did is they increased the PST and didn't provide the long-term property tax reductions. So this government is notorious for saying one thing prior to the

election and doing something completely different after. And when the Finance minister of that time from Regina Victoria was asked, well why did you raise the PST right after the election, why didn't you talk about it during the campaign, his statement was, well you can't talk about raising taxes during a campaign. So that's going to be what happens in this case.

They're running a \$700 million deficit. The debt has increased by \$900 million, and there's only one of three things they can do to change that. They could increase taxes to cover that off. They can cut programs to diminish the deficit, or they can continue to run deficits like their favourite politician Grant Devine did in the 1980s, Mr. Speaker. Those are their alternatives. They're heading down that path already.

And fact is, the announcement today with SaskEnergy really reminds me of the 1986 campaign where they're promising heaven and earth to homeowners with the energy program just before an election to try and get votes.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a sustainable budget and I will not be supporting it. I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you very much. It's my honour to be here as part of this great budget debate. Great budget — maybe the debate isn't as great as the budget is, but the budget is certainly great.

Before I get into that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to congratulate the member for Martensville. I listened carefully to her speech and she added some value to and brings something to this Assembly. So I congratulate her on completing her budget speech, which was also her maiden speech.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is just amazing. It's awesome. This is a budget for my constituents. This is a budget that provides for \$15 prescription fees for senior citizens. It is a budget for people — my constituents and many others.

This is a budget that freezes university tuition fees. The Minister of Finance announced \$21 million this year to freeze, for the third year in a row, post-secondary tuition fees. This is a budget for people. My people. Our people. This is a budget that deepens the education property tax relief from 8 per cent to 10 per cent — that announced by the Minister of Finance a few days ago. This is a budget for people. My people. Our people.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker, this budget deals with the future. It deals with the exemption for post-secondary graduands that provides an exemption from all Saskatchewan provincial income tax on the first \$20,000 each and every year for the five years for a total of 100,000. Except I'm misspeaking a little bit. You see, Mr. Speaker, it's indexed to inflation and by the fifth year it's not \$20,000 alone, it's something closer to \$21,000 is what the exemption is going to be in the fifth year. Ooh, they said. Ooh is important. Ooh is for my people. The opposition pooh-pooh

it. This is real benefits for real people, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't be prouder of what the Minister of Finance stood up and delivered short days ago.

We've got more money for highways and our highways need fixing, there's no question about it. With the ever changing demands, Mr. Speaker, on Saskatchewan highways, the uses, it's small wonder that our highways take a beating. You know, Mr. Speaker, a few years ago — three is my recollection — I was in my hometown visiting and we were having some meetings in my school. And I counted the semis going by on that tertiary highway. And, you know, I timed it even and it averaged a semi every seventeen and a half minutes. Well let me tell you, you know, I'm not that antiquated, but I remember when I was a little kid in school and when a semi went by on that highway, the teacher would stop teaching and we just watched the semi go by. My times are changing.

Is it any wonder that our highways, our tertiary highways take a beating? Is it any wonder that this Minister of Finance had to announce a huge highways rebuilding budget? We are very proud of what we're doing. And we're doing it in an affordable, sustainable way for people.

Mr. Speaker, I am astounded. We cut taxes last fall. We cut the PST from 7 per cent to 5 per cent, and what did the opposition say? They said, well we told you to do that. We cut income taxes, personal income taxes. Each year in the last five years, we've saved the average four-person family earning \$50,000, we've saved them \$1,200, Mr. Speaker. A little more on that I'll say but we went from \$3,540 to \$2,353. That's the Saskatchewan income tax that family would pay five years ago to today. A \$1,200 savings.

It's astounding, Mr. Speaker. What did they say? Oh, good. They said, tax cuts are good. But this budget . . . Tax budgets are good but this budget, Mr. Speaker, when we actually spend the taxpayers' money on services for people, services like a \$15 prescription drug for every senior citizen in Saskatchewan they say the S-word. Unsustainable, they say. Tax cuts are good but services for people, unsustainable, they say. Well shame on them, Mr. Speaker. When we put up 21 million to freeze post-secondary tuition fees for the third year in a row, they say unsustainable, Mr. Speaker. Well shame on them.

The Fiscal Stabilization Fund they called the rainy day fund. Well they always cried, Mr. Speaker, that we shouldn't have it. First of all, they say you shouldn't have the Fiscal Stabilization Fund; you shouldn't ought to save money. Well we're kind of like the favourite child that parents sometimes have, the favourite child that actually takes 10 per cent of their money or 5 per cent of their earnings, some amount, and they actually put it in a credit union savings account, Mr. Speaker. What for? So that when they need to buy a new vehicle they can pay cash. Well isn't that a shame?

Premier, we've got money, we've got cash, we can pay cash for some things. They say deficit. What nonsense, Mr. Speaker. What absolute nonsense. I am so proud our . . . [inaudible] . . . budget pointed out on page 44, I think it is, page 44. My vanity won't let me put my cheaters on, Mr. Speaker. On top of which I can't hardly find them. Here they are, here they are. Here they are. Now we'll get to it, and it is page 44. My memory didn't

totally fail me, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to point out the year-end balance in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. In 2003-2004 the balance closing was 366 million.

I also want to say, not so much for the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, because there's no one so deaf as one who will not listen. I want to say for anyone who is tuned in on Internet or on TV, I want to say to them, in 2003-04 that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund had \$366 million in it. This year, at the end of this year, after we draw it down by \$510 million, after we draw that fiscal stabilization down, it's going to have \$378 million in it. Eleven, nearly \$12 million more than it had in 2003-2004.

Well I want to say this too before I leave that. In 2003-2004, we projected out four years, our budget, we projected it out. We tend to do things a little cautiously on this side of the legislature. Why do we do it? Because we're spending our neighbours', our friends', our moms', our dads', our brothers', our sisters' money — we're spending people's money. When we tax money, we're taxing from people and corporations for the greater good of all of the people and corporations in Saskatchewan. We do that, we take that seriously, Mr. Speaker. We tax and spend appropriately, wisely, just as if it was our own money.

And we projected out 2003-04 that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund was going to have just a mere \$40 million in it this year. And every year subsequent we missed and we put more money into that savings account and we cut taxes and we paid debt down. Why? Because we budget small "c" conservatively. We don't want to get caught short.

There's nothing worse than caught short, à la Grant Devine; à la the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Swift Current who worked in John Gerich's office in the '80s; à la the Finance critic, who was Grant Devine's youth president in 1985. Can you imagine being youth president in 1985 of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan and you still hang around with the right-wing ideas? Unbelievable. He was there in their worst hours to date, their worst hours to date — 1985-86 — they were there in their worst hours and he's hanging around now trying to get his hand on the throttle and his other hand in the till or the cookie jar, as we speak. I say shame.

Mr. Speaker, we try and govern by providing services for people, services that opposition Sask Party say is unsustainable — unsustainable, they say. Oh give the big corporations whatever tax cuts you want. That's perfect, that's great they say. But provide real services for real people and it's unsustainable. What a shame that is.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today I did a member's statement, and we're restricted to 90 seconds, so I wanted to read a little bit more of what . . . Michael Gregory, who is the senior economist at the Bank of Montreal, and Michael Gregory says:

. . . when it comes to financial management, the Saskatchewan government is [is the] at the top of its class . . .

When it comes to financial management, the Saskatchewan government is at the top of, of the . . . my goodness, at the

top of its class. I won't go through that one again. I'm going to go on to something else that he said.

Michael Gregory goes on, quote, if someone says are they doing a good job, well you know:

"Name me one other jurisdiction anywhere that you can think of that . . . can point to 14 balanced budgets in a row" . . .

I need more hands here, "14 balanced budgets in a row." He goes on. He says:

Those cuts will . . . lead to revenue growth [those tax cuts will lead to revenue growth] for the province . . .

He says on the spending side — get this, opposition, he says — on the spending side, the government has taken a responsible, sustainable approach, and it has left enough money in the province's rainy day fund, quote, you know where they are right now with still a decent fiscal cushion. You know, they have 3 or 4 percent of revenues in terms of the financial stabilization fund which is an "adequate cushion," end quote. Thank you, Michael Gregory, Bank of Montreal.

My colleagues, three of them, did other quotes from other banks in member statements earlier today. Am I going to listen . . . I don't always quote from banks, but I have to respect their fiscal acumen. I have to respect that they're always looking to the future. They don't have a four-year cycle. They don't have an election cycle. Nobody can accuse them of that.

Michael Gregory's never run — that I'm aware of — for a nomination or you know to run for a seat in a legislature or the House of Commons. That's not his game plan. He wants simply to protect the interests of the Bank of Montreal and to provide good advice that all can follow. And here we are, we take that.

Now do we listen to the banks, people like Michael Gregory, or do we listen to the naysayers opposite when they say it's unsustainable. When Michael Gregory says they've taken a responsible, sustainable approach and it has left . . . and it goes on and on. I've said the quote; you can review that on yourself, by yourself.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan has an economy that is hotter than a \$2 pistol. We've never had such high employment. I couldn't be prouder to be a member of the government. We've had some lean times. We've had times when people were desperate for work. When part-timers . . . we had to introduce legislation to protect benefits for part-time workers. Why? Because there was just way more workers than there were jobs. And some — some — a minority, some unscrupulous employers took advantage of that. To them I say, shame on you. To those small number, small number of unscrupulous employers, Mr. Speaker, I am delighted because they're going to have to pony up now for workers. And that's a good thing. It's time workers were able to hold their heads up proud in every way, every day.

I talked about our economy being hotter than a \$2 pistol, Mr. Speaker. I want to review a little bit of history because I asked Economic Development and they were kind enough to give me real gross domestic product growth rates from 1982 to 2005 . . .

is the last year they've got them finished. And I'm going to save the opposition from having to read all of the numbers; Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to save everybody cause numbers are just that, a bunch of numbers.

But I want to point this out. Members opposite say that New Democrats govern in good times and we're lucky. They govern in bad times because they're unlucky. Well I tell you, if ever I heard a reason to elect New Democrats, that's it. And the proof is in the real gross domestic product numbers. Mr. Speaker, in terms of the numbers, in nine Devine Tory years, Saskatchewan was dead last in all of Canada in gross domestic product growth, dead last three out of nine — one third of the time — three out of nine. Oh it was just bad luck. Oh it was just bad luck says the member for Estevan who was Grant Devine's assistant at the constituency level. Well what's our record? First, second, or third in Canada six times in 14 years — six times in 14 years. We'd like it to be better but far, far better than the record of the Tories.

Mr. Speaker, the economy is on a roll. We have overcome huge adversity. We are paying down the debt every single year we continue to govern. The debt as a percentage of gross domestic . . . And the member for Wood River says those are all lies. Well can't you read the budget, member? Can't you read the budget? Can't you understand a simple financial statement?

[20:15]

The Speaker: — Order. Order please. I just wish to remind the member that all remarks should be addressed through the Chair. Member for Regina Coronation Park is recognized.

Mr. Trew: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I wrap up, I want to say again I will be voting against the amendment, and I'm going to be proudly voting for this government that provides real services for real people, my constituents and yours, and everyone's constituents — real people in Saskatchewan. I couldn't be prouder, Mr. Speaker. This is a great budget. I will be voting against the amendment and for the main motion.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, in order to accommodate the work this evening of the Standing Committee on the Economy and then the Crown and Central Agencies, which will succeed one another in room 8, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — The motion at this stage is still out of order. I would ask the member to complete his statement and adjourn.

Mr. Trew: — Mr. Speaker, I missed my final note, which was to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the member for Regina Coronation Park that the debate be now adjourned. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Speaker, this will come as no surprise to you, but in order to accommodate the good work of the standing committees on the Economy and Crown and Central Agencies, which will succeed each other in that order, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — It has been moved by the Government House Leader that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Motion is carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 20:15.]

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