



THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE

of the

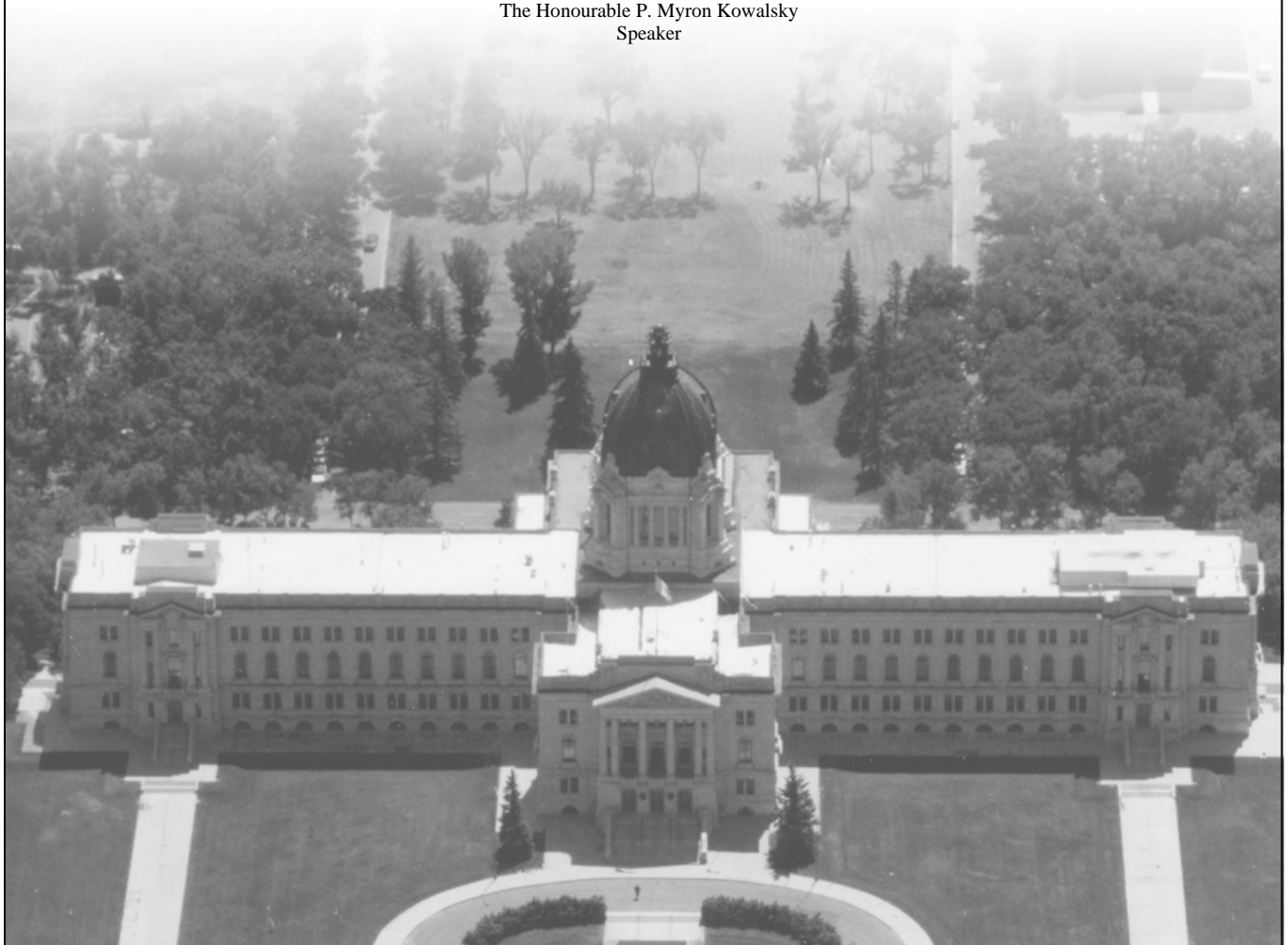
Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of

The Honourable P. Myron Kowalsky
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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 Premier — Hon. Lorne Calvert
 Leader of the Opposition — Brad Wall

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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 will resume on the special order which is the motion moved by the Minister of Finance, seconded by the Minister of the Public Service Commission:

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

And the amendment 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.

The Chair recognizes the member for Meadow Lake.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to be able to rise and enter into the debate on the budget. I want to thank those members on both sides of the House that accommodated me because my family was to be attending here this evening, but my wife got stuck in Saskatoon. The aircraft broke down so she’s not able to bring my children.

But I want to say to them, who I know are watching, Mayson and Meika, thank you very much for their support. All of us in this legislature know that we need the support of our families. And Mayson and Meika are back at home with our sitter, Justina, watching at this very minute. And I want to thank as well Virginia, who has been tremendous support for me through all the years.

I was thinking a bit — this is a bit ironic. A number of sessions back, most of my colleagues here will know this, but I used to get asked a lot of questions in this House. This last number of sessions nobody’s asked me any questions in this House any more. Now all of the questions come from my house back at my place and they’re tough questions, Mr. Speaker, they’re tough questions from Mayson and Meika. And the supplementaries are like why, and another supplementary, why, and why and

why and why. And those are hard questions to answer. And the difference here is that you actually have to answer the questions. And so high-quality questions from my son and daughter unlike what I used to get from members opposite. So good for them.

Anyway I also want to take the opportunity to thank my family back at home, my parents John and Dorothy Sonntag, who have been tremendous support for me and real role models.

The Speaker: — Order please. The Chair recognizes the member for Meadow Lake, the Minister for CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan].

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the members opposite are learning from my son and daughter. Their quality of questions has already gone up a notch.

Mr. Speaker, I as well want to just very quickly thank my constituency assistants back in Meadow Lake, Elaine Yaychuk and Billy Dawn Derocher, and of course all of my staff here, Sheila and Sheila and Deanna and Gaylene and Marmie. They all do a wonderful job for me and I thank them very much for their support.

I want to as well acknowledge and congratulate the new member from Martensville and I wish her well in her time in the legislature. I certainly enjoyed working with her father as well.

And I want to say what a great pleasure it is to represent the constituency of Meadow Lake, truly in my view one of the most diversified constituencies in the province. It’s covered with lakes and trees and rivers. There’s farming. There’s forestry. Agriculture, as I mentioned. We have a wonderful abundance of tourism, obviously, with those assets. We have six different First Nations in our community, lots of Métis culture and a lot of different ethnic groups in our community who are all strongly and very culturally diversified, and they do lots to keep their culture alive and well.

And that’s why I’m so proud to be able to support this budget. It’s so good for my riding, Mr. Speaker. It proves to me once again that Saskatchewan really is the best place to live, to work, and to raise your families.

I want to touch on just a couple of the highlights, Mr. Speaker, in this budget. First of all, the 14th consecutive balanced budget — that is truly amazing, Mr. Speaker. Sixteen consecutive credit rating upgrades, Mr. Speaker, sixteen consecutive credit rating upgrades. I think that puts us on par now with the rating equivalent to probably Ontario, and I think that’s something that we should be extremely proud of.

Record job numbers. Record job numbers. And I noticed, I think it was in the paper just the other day, they talked about the job numbers, January of this past year — ’07 over January of ’06 — phenomenal growth. Close to 10 per cent growth in those numbers, my recollection is. And in January, those are hard numbers to meet because January is traditionally not a big month for job growth numbers, so that’s extremely good.

Our debt/GDP [gross domestic product] ratio: 15.6 per cent, Mr. Speaker, 15.6 per cent. That's the third lowest in all of Canada. I remember when we formed government back in 1991, the debt/GDP ratio, to the best of my recollection, was very close to 70 per cent — virtually bankrupt. And again, if my memory serves me right, I think Newfoundland was the only other jurisdiction that had debt/GDP ratio as awful as ours.

In the past four years, Mr. Speaker, we paid off 820 million in debt. And I just saw on the news tonight; the federal budget has passed. That means that Saskatchewan will get an additional 226 million one-time. We grudgingly accept that. Seventy per cent of that will go to debt as well. And so that means, Mr. Speaker, that in the last four years alone this province will have reduced the debt of our province by nearly \$1 billion.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Sonntag: — That's a significant amount. A significant amount. And, Mr. Speaker, I would say, and to members in the House, I would say that's to a large degree why the credit rating of this province continues to go up and to a large degree why the banks and bond rating agencies refer to this province as having one of the best-managed budgets in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Sales tax for me, clearly, representing a constituency close to the west side of the border, west side of our province, is a big issue. And the reduction from 7 to 5 per cent really made a big difference. That saved 340 million out of the taxpayers' pocket. And in the last few years since our Premier has been Premier of this province, there have been over \$650 million in tax cuts alone.

Mr. Speaker, in the last little while, in the announcement of the budget, I've travelled around the province. And one of the highlights that clearly was a highlight of this budget is the graduate tax credit. And if the early response is any indication, this will be extremely well received. Students can receive, over a five-year period, benefits of being able to earn up to \$100,000 income tax free. And that is remarkable.

All you need to do is have completed a program and have your diploma or your certificate or a degree or in fact even a journeyman's certificate. As long as your course has been six months or longer, you can receive that tax benefit and you don't have to have received that education here in Saskatchewan. So we are encouraging young people — and anyone for that matter, who has just received a certificate or a degree or a diploma — to stay in Saskatchewan or to move back to Saskatchewan or in fact come and live here in Saskatchewan for the very first time.

And I know from the students who were here from the regional college, a number of young Aboriginal students from the regional college in Meadow Lake on the budget day, after the budget was over they were asking me about it and we talked a bit about it and they were really enthused.

And by the way, Mr. Speaker, this is a little-known fact, but in Saskatchewan as it relates to personal income tax, while still not significant in absolute numbers, one of the fastest growing tax base in our province is Aboriginal people paying tax. One of the

fastest growing tax bases at a personal level. And I know the young folks I talked to were very, very interested in the graduate tax credit and they are very interested in working and contributing their share to our province as well. And they have much to contribute.

Mr. Speaker, the other hallmark of the budget clearly was the seniors' drug plan. And I had the good fortune of being able to be in Lloydminster the day after the budget to talk a bit about the budget. I met with somewhere between I think it was 40 to 50 to 60 seniors at one of the centres, and this was something we spent a lot of time talking about. I know it was well received there. There was a few who had some concerns about it, but overall it was extremely well received. And I know a number of them came up to me afterwards talking about it, just to say how much they appreciated it and how much difference it would make in their lives.

Mr. Speaker, here are some of the reasons why we can do it. After 10 years of trying to get our debt under control, we finally got it under control. And under this Premier, the last five years we spent getting the economy in shape. And, Mr. Speaker, it's in such good shape now to the point where now, where we're anticipating our GDP to hit 2.9 per cent, which is fully a half a per cent above the national average. And that is remarkable for a province like Saskatchewan. It used to be solely reliant on agriculture and now we have a very, very diversified economy. And that's part of the reason, while it's unfortunate what my friends and neighbours and family are experiencing in agriculture, it also says that we're so diversified in Saskatchewan's economy that we still have growth of 2.9 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that we've indexed the income tax benefits again — very good news for everyone. The seniors as well talked about the income tax splittings. The federal government agreed to income tax, to income splitting, I should say. We've essentially mirrored that initiative by the federal government — and I know that's much appreciated — now to the point where the average person in the last few years is paying in fact up to \$1,200 per year less. And that is really remarkable.

I know that transportation is a big issue for lots of the constituents that I represent, and I know across the province. And I'm extremely pleased to see our budget this year to hit \$433 million. And in my view that is remarkable. I know when I was the minister, the first time I held that portfolio, I think we were something just below \$200 million, so to see this budget now more than doubled in the last few years is . . . You will see significant improvements in the roadways across our province. And I know this year we'll complete the highway twinning on Highway No. 1 and No. 16 West.

In addition to that, I put on my minister's hat at First Nations and Métis Relations. I'm extremely pleased to see the continued support for access to First Nations. I know that Mistawasis has been added to the list, and I know the chief and council are extremely pleased with that. And we continue to work on other communities — Onion Lake and others — and all of these are, all of these communities are vital to the growth of our province, and I am optimistic that we'll be able to continue to support that initiative.

[19:15]

Mr. Speaker, as well I want to talk a little bit about some of the benefits to the municipalities. This last while there has been some concern about the level of funding, but there have been significant increases in funding to municipalities. In this budget alone an additional \$30 million will go to municipalities by way of unconditional grants to the revenue-sharing pools. And I know again, with the budget having passed tonight federally, another 30 per cent there will add a significant amount to the reduction of education portion of property tax.

In addition to that, we've added child care spaces, 500 new licensed spaces, which now brings it to 9,300 in our province; 15 new pre-kindergarten programs, which now brings the number of programs all the way up to 134.

And also I think an initiative that will maybe not go too noticed now, but I think in years to come people will see this as a very good initiative, that is the new dental sealant program for kids in grades 1 and 7. And I know there's a lot of parents see this as a very worthwhile initiative.

We've added 2,100 new training spaces, which now brings us to over 31,000 training spaces in our province, which represents fully a 24 per cent increase in training spaces since 2003.

In agriculture, Mr. Speaker, we've added \$118 million for CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization] again, which is very important to many of my constituents. That's for '07. For '06 we've done the top-up, another \$60 million. We've added 104 million for crop insurance — all of these extremely important initiatives. And I know I saw some of the headlines in a number of the papers. And while there was still concern in the agricultural community, there is much appreciation for what this government has done.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit now about the portfolio that I have of First Nations and Métis Relations. An issue that has been front and centre for many First Nations and Métis communities across the province, is a complex issue but a very important issue for those it directly affected — that is the issue of the duty to consult.

Many First Nations as a result, and Métis communities, as a result of the Supreme Court decision now have a ruling that requires federal and provincial governments, where Crown land is involved and where their communities are affected, there is a legal responsibility for us as a government to consult and accommodate on issues that might affect them and their communities, and in fact as it relates to First Nations people, to their traditional hunting and gathering areas.

Many First Nations and Métis communities said to me and to our government that they simply didn't have the capacity to negotiate. So if in fact there was a major industrial development taking place in their community, they may well be notified but they couldn't hire a lawyer or they couldn't hire a consultant to actually sit down and do the analysis of what impact it might actually have on their community.

So as a result, in this budget we allocated \$2.3 million specifically for the capacity for First Nations and Métis

communities across the province — 300,000 of that will go to new positions in the Department of First Nations to actually deal with the issue of consultation, and the other 2 million is entirely for the First Nations and Métis communities as their communities are impacted. That money will only be allocated when their communities would be impacted.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have allocated an additional 1 million to fund an additional estimated 100 seats for skills training. And I know many communities, Aboriginal communities across the province, are extremely appreciative of the fact that we now have mobile units that are going directly out into the communities and providing training as it relates to trades. And in my view this is one of the most unique ideas and one of the benefits of this budget that will help communities, I think, much beyond what we can currently anticipate.

There's a number of initiatives we could go through but I think I won't have a lot more time. But I do want to say that, I want to highlight just a couple of them yet. We've added \$300,000 for First Nations training and emergency preparedness. And in addition to that, we've again allocated our responsibility for treaty land entitlement, \$4.6 million. There's 822,000 for the Aboriginal employment development program, and I know this has been an extremely successful initiative. Just recently I was out at Kawacatoose where we did a significant Aboriginal employment signing there. Lots of people in attendance, tremendous excitement, and they're doing lots of training right on that First Nation. And I know Chief Dustyhorn and others should be congratulated for all the wonderful work that they have done out there.

We've again committed our allocation of 1.5 million to the First Nations and Métis economic development program. And by the way, while I'm speaking of Métis, I'm pleased as well . . . There's been a lot of work done on this by a lot of people and today we just announced that the Métis election is back on. So that funds for that will flow not to the Métis Nation yet, but the election is, the Métis election is now back on track.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I spoke with a number of First Nations people, and I want to just say that I'm hugely disappointed by the federal government's budget as it relates to Aboriginal people across our country. There's been hardly a mention, hardly a mention, even though we had a commitment from the federal government that if the Kelowna accord, even though the Kelowna accord wasn't being supported that they would essentially support all the initiatives in that accord.

Well you would have thought in the federal budget at least there'd have been some mention. There was not a mention at all. And in fact, Mr. Speaker, here's what I read on the Net. It says as follows. This was Andrew Scheer, the MP [Member of Parliament] who represents the area close by Regina here. He was on . . . Regina-Qu'Appelle. He was on the John Gormley show. And here's what he thinks about it, and I think it's reflective of what the federal Conservative government thinks and I think to a large degree what the opposition Sask Party thinks. He says, and I quote, he says:

We know that taxpayers in Saskatchewan don't want to throw [away, throw away, if you can imagine] another \$5 billion at the problems [he describes them as problems] of

First Nations people through the Kelowna accord. They know that if throwing money at the problem was the answer, it would have been fixed four years ago.

Well, Mr. Speaker, if you draw that conclusion, that First Nations people are a problem, Mr. Speaker, and that throwing money away — if this is throwing money away, the Kelowna accord — no wonder we have problems with this federal government. And we have problems with the opposition Sask Party when they won't even stand up in the House and debate the issues of equalization. They won't even tell their federal cousins that they should vote against this budget as it relates to equalization, but to tell them to vote against it on this principle as well, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting today. I listened to — on this notion as well — I listened out of the Canadian Press, the federal minister, the federal minister of INAC [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada], Mr. Speaker, says that he will not apologize to First Nations people. Mr. Speaker, here's what it says. It says:

Indian Affairs Minister Jim Prentice said Monday [Monday, that's yesterday] that the \$2-billion compensation package finalized by the Conservatives does not [I repeat, does not] include an apology, so none is forthcoming.

I think that's appalling, Mr. Speaker. First of all you don't honour commitments that have been made by previous governments as it relates to an extremely important initiative. And then on something like this that is not big dollars but, Mr. Speaker, means a tremendous amount, that you won't have the decency to apologize to these affected people, Mr. Speaker, I think is a travesty.

Mr. Speaker, as well I listened to, I listened to the . . . I think I need to wrap this up here pretty quickly. I listened to the Finance critic — and I'll close on this — I listened to the Finance critic on CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] a couple of mornings ago. And, Mr. Speaker, he talked about the Auto Fund. Well as the Minister of SGI [Saskatchewan Government Insurance] for quite a number of years I know that you can't take \$100 million out of the Auto Fund and reduce taxes. You can't take it out of the Auto Fund and afford all kinds of programming to people because that money belongs, Mr. Speaker, that money belongs to the people who paid those premiums. So you can't do that.

Now I'm reminded as well, this is the same Finance critic that was going to reduce the sales tax on groceries last year, so I'm not too surprised that he might propose something like this.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length, Mr. Speaker, I have so many wonderful, I have so many wonderful things that I could talk about but I am being told that I'm coming very close.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, I'll say just one more thing. I'll say just one more thing . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Okay. The recommendation, the recommendation, Mr. Speaker, also the Finance critic suggested that what he would do as well in addition to all this — because he was being asked where he would get all this money from — he said he would take \$50

million out of Investment Saskatchewan. There's a \$50 million allocation to Investment Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, for those who don't understand accounting, that sounds logical. But, Mr. Speaker, it is the Devine school of economics because what it is — it's equity stripping. Because what you're doing is you're taking 50 million, you're taking \$50 million cash that would have — essentially is an asset — that would have gone into another investment that could have earned money for the people of Saskatchewan. He's saying he'd take that \$50 million and put it into the General Revenue Fund. That's what Devine did in the '80s and that's why our Crowns and the Crown Investments Corporation was in such deep financial trouble almost as well to the point of bankruptcy.

So you can see, Mr. Speaker, when we listen to our Minister of Finance talking about our budget and when you listen to the opposition talking about the budget and when you listen to the bankers and the investment dealers across Canada and North America talking of our budgets and how sustainable they are and how fiscally prudent this government is, it's easy to understand why the people of Saskatchewan have belief and trust in this government and why they do not have any belief or believe there's any credibility in what the opposition says.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this budget and voting against the amendment. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak again for the people of Batoche. The people of Batoche are not very happy with this deficit budget. They see it as a sellout. The people of Batoche were upset to hear that this NDP [New Democratic Party] government had blown that mountain of money received from the increased profits of resource revenues. They were enraged to hear that not only they blew the mountain of money, but a deficit, Mr. Speaker. How dare they — a deficit?

This government has disappointed the people to the point they are desperate to have an election. Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party is just about daily meeting with business groups and community groups that are asking for help and want a change of government, Mr. Speaker. Some of the groups are even unions who have had enough. They've had enough of this NDP government mismanagement.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard a story about how the member from Regina South became Finance minister. Now, Mr. Speaker, this is just a rumour I've heard. The story goes that the Premier was looking for a new Finance minister so they were interviewing potential members. The first member they called forward was the member for Regina Dewdney. The first question asked was, how much is one plus one? The member from Regina Dewdney said two.

There were other questions. Then they called on the member from Regina South. They also asked him what is one plus one. His reply was, what would you like it to be? And he got the job.

That, Mr. Speaker, is possibly why the Finance minister believes he has a balanced budget.

This is not a balanced budget. It is a deficit. Mr. Speaker, when you do your books, when you do your income tax, when you do your investments, who do you ask? Your accountant.

Who does the government hire to do their books? Accountants. Mr. Speaker, the chartered accountants of Saskatchewan says that the budget is not balanced. It is a deficit budget.

Mr. Speaker, Janice MacKinnon, former member of this House and Finance minister of that party, says that this budget is not balanced. David MacLean of the taxpayers federation, who is heard well across the country with the taxpayers federation, says it is not balanced.

Look at this tired, old government's record. Last election they said the Sask Party would lay off government employees if elected. They went around and yelled us up and down that we would be laying off SaskTel employees if we were elected. And then when they were elected, they immediately laid off 44 employees.

Who promised during the election no tax increase? That was part of their platform — no tax increase. And yet once the NDP were elected, they moved the PST [provincial sales tax] up two points — not just one, but two points. They moved it up after a promise of no tax increase.

[19:30]

And then when they, after the oil revenues started coming in several years later, they moved it down. And gloriously, we've moved it down two points, they yell. They'd just gotten it back to where they originally were. They haven't gained anything, and it's the truth.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture in Batoche, which is predominantly the business of the area, this budget cut to the bone — 68 million less for agriculture. What does the government expect to happen with 68 million less? That is actual dollars. That's not the fancy numbers with the frills. That's actual dollars from last year's budget to this year's budget is \$68 million less.

Mr. Speaker, the rural communities are desperate. They're in terrible state of affairs. They don't know which way to turn, and the government — \$68 million less. Farmers are working out. Their wives are working out on the side, and they're trying to keep the farm running. Families are suffering. Communities are suffering. And they're looking for help. And what does the government give agriculture? \$68 million less.

The government has to work out programs to help agriculture. Not just dollars programs, but programs with the feds. And we have to establish some form of communication to let these farmers know that we are there to help them and there is hope for the future.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at biodiesel and ethanol and how it is happening in other provinces, and it's just not on the move here yet. It would be nice to see some action taken and get biodiesel and ethanol going, which could be the turnaround points for

agriculture in this province.

Mr. Speaker, another issue I'd like to dwell on is forestry. Mr. Speaker, what is the deal in P.A. [Prince Albert]? On again, or off again? After the minister got up and said to the press that the deal was imminent, that it just had to be verified, then he tries to pull the deal, say it isn't happening. What's happening to the people's emotions, the people of that community? It's on again, off again, and they just don't know. It's not fair to the people.

And now we hear that they're going to be moving out the paper-making equipment from the former Weyerhaeuser mill in P.A. Nothing is said about that. People are wondering. They don't know. We should have confirmation of what is happening there.

And then we hear that the deal up at Meadow Lake, the Meadow Lake mill that we still have 20 per cent ownership . . . All these years, trying to get rid of the mill. They finally get rid of it but they hang on to 20 per cent. And we hear that there's actually a five-year walk-away clause, which means in five years time we could have the whole mess back in our lap again — no solutions, nothing done.

It's time to get some serious answers for what must be done in forestry. Forestry could be a very viable industry, especially when you look at what is happening to the other provinces with the lodgepole pine beetle, how it's devastating the BC [British Columbia] forest. And I've heard some estimates that it could decimate up to 80 per cent of the BC forest.

Saskatchewan has to get their act together. The time will come where they're going to be looking at Saskatchewan forest and we should be ready for it. The lodgepole pine beetle of course has moved into Alberta already too, so we hope it can be stopped and that Saskatchewan forestry can be ahead of the game and grow strong and tall.

Mr. Speaker, another issue I want to talk about is health care. In my community, Humboldt hospital has been promised for three elections. Three elections on the same promise and guess what? This election they'll be promising that this time for sure you'll get the Humboldt hospital, for sure this time — four elections. Mr. Speaker, there's been no sod turning, no ribbon cutting, none of the details have been done. It's just, we're going to promise you another hospital. It's time, it's time for that promise to be kept.

Mr. Speaker, also in my constituency is Wakaw Hospital and it is now closed for emergency service. What does this say to the people of the community? How can a community grow when their hospital has a sign that it's closed for emergency service? Anyone looking at possibly moving into a community says, how long will we even have a hospital? Do we even have a hospital now? These issues have to be addressed.

The government, our present government when they took power, closed 45 hospitals. And they took so much heat over that that they decided that they're not going to close any more hospitals. They're just going to cut the legs out from underneath them and watch them close themselves. And now we sit on the longest waiting list in Canada by the party that claims to be the founder of medicare, and we sit on the longest waiting list in all

of Canada. The issue's not being addressed; it's not clear.

And now we talk about this new drug plan. Well there already is a drug plan, and it's one we can afford. The new drug plan, all the experts say, isn't affordable. We can't handle it. And then the big question also about the big, new drug deal is, what about the drug list? How many of these drugs aren't on the list? It won't benefit people anyhow if the drugs aren't on the list.

And then there's the nursing shortage. SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses] came to this Assembly the day of the budget looking for 200 nurses. And what did the deficit say? Eighteen. Now that's an insult to SUN, and they were very upset by it. And our communities are not happy once again.

And then the government has gone to our rural communities and said, schools — 50 schools scheduled for closure. Fifty, Mr. Speaker. And they said before that that school board amalgamations, that would be the thing. They'd put all these school boards together, and they would save so much money that they could afford to do anything. Well, Mr. Speaker, they didn't save anything. In fact it's costing more money. Not less money — more money. And the future looks as though it's going to get worse and worse.

We've brought forward the proposal of schools of opportunity and schools of necessity, and people have taken to this very much. But in order for the school boards to do this, the government has to finance it. Yes, the school boards have the decision to make. But when they look at their budgets, it's dollars they're looking at. And they don't have enough dollars to do what they need to keep some of these schools open. In my area there's a school, Osborne School which is just a little ways out of P.A. — and beautiful little school — and they have to look at that one seriously as one of these schools.

And then of course, Mr. Speaker, there's one of my favourite issues, and every year I get up and I talk about highways and Highway 368. So now the government says they're coming out with a 10-year plan. Well where were they for the last 16 years? Where was the plan then? This plan admits failure. This plan shows and admits that they had nothing. And the plan that they're proposing, when you start crunching the numbers looks like it would come out to maybe even less in 10 years — if you consider inflation — than what they're getting now. So where's the gain? Where's the gain?

I want to quote Hollywood now and Kevin Costner in his movie, *Field of Dreams*, and he said, build it and they will come. Mr. Speaker, build it and they will come. And that applies to our highways. If you don't build it, they can't come.

Highway 368 is a detriment to our economic growth, to the growth of this whole province. Seventy million dollars worth of taxes collected from that area each year, and all they're asking for is a stretch of highway. That's all they're requiring. They don't ask for any government help or intervention. They'll do it all on their own. Just give them a highway.

Also in my constituency now — is getting worse and worse every year — is Highway 20. It's a disgrace from Middle Lake north to the junction of Highway 3 at Birch Hills. I think to drive a 10-mile stretch you've got to go just about 12 miles

because you're zigzagging back and forth around the holes, so the travel distance I think is increased. And it's a constant dodge hole, dodge hole. And the people of my area use this highway a lot in order to travel to P.A. to do business there, so it's a detriment to the business in P.A.

The people of my area also use Highway 27, which runs Prud'homme, Vonda, and Aberdeen. This highway also is another one that you have to be continually, continually dodging holes. You can't drive on a straight stretch.

And what's going to happen there, Mr. Speaker? On these highways we're looking for an accident. It's just not safe, and one of these times there's going to be a serious accident. And what will the coroner's report say? Due to unsafe highway conditions. We can't have this; it must be addressed. But the highways have been left in neglect for so long, there's just so much to do all at once, that it's more than most people are willing to stand for.

Mr. Speaker, on the positive side, Weyburn-Big Muddy by-election — Tommy Douglas's home seat. And did we win that? I heard a member say, did we win that. Boy, did we win that one in a big way. People have had enough. They wanted a change and they made that change. Even the poll where, the little church that Tommy Douglas used to preach from, even that poll went to the Saskatchewan Party. The time has come, people looking for a serious change.

Mr. Speaker, the Martensville by-election was also great news. That's another one, another big victory, and this time the biggest victory. And to the NDP it was the largest defeat they have ever had in history. They forfeited their deposit even. Never in history before have they gone to that point where they even forfeited their deposit.

It confirmed what we've all expected. People have had enough. People all across this province saw the result and as a positive step in the right direction. And, Mr. Speaker, they want to move this whole province in that direction. They want to see things happen in this province. They want to see industries open up. They want to see their children have jobs in this province. They're tired of travelling these broken-down roads and going to Alberta to visit their children. It's time to make that opportunity to have them home. Therefore at this time I cannot support this budget and I support the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the hon. member for Regina Wascana Plains.

Ms. Hamilton: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to be able to enter into the budget debate this evening. And I've always enjoyed budget debates because I always have in my mind the idea that my colleagues will share with me some of their priorities, the good points they see from the budget, and there's so much. There's enough to cover all of the members on this side putting forward their ideas. And to see them reflected in the budget before us after many, many months of debate and tough decision making in some instances, but some good priority setting and some goals in some areas that we'll be working in a positive way over the year ahead.

And I've been straining and listening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, trying to hear from the members opposite what they would do in their budget. You know, community does an alternative budget. You'd expect that people who want to one day form a government would want to put forward to community what they would want to see happen to make their communities a better quality of life, to see them grow, to be able to put forward a positive alternative.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and also when they're going to be able to say that they're going to add something to the budget, know that they have to remove something. And I haven't heard yet from the members opposite. If they're not going to want to see something happening in the budget, what would they cut? Where would they cut money to add the things that they're going to add to the budget? And I have yet to hear that during this budget debate.

And it's clear that the members opposite have been singing from their leader's gloom and doom songbook. As a matter of fact, the leader, the member from Swift Current, in responding to an email from a young person who was looking for some positive leadership from that member, and whether or not Saskatchewan would be a good place to come to live, to make a home, that member sent back the gloomy message about what it's like to be in Saskatchewan — actually the same gloomy message I heard that they take to their steak night in Alberta.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've heard from some members of the legislative in Alberta who said, I don't know, I was listening to the Leader of the Opposition from your province, and why is he so down on your province? Why so down on Saskatchewan?

Everything is gloom and doom here. They don't offer positive alternatives on how they would turn things around or they don't recognize that there are things happening in Saskatchewan.

[19:45]

But I'd like to contrast that with when you get out in your community, when you get out and you talk to real people that are out there working, coming back to Saskatchewan, raising a family. They know that Saskatchewan is attracting young people because Saskatchewan is a happening place. Saskatchewan is a showcase to the world. Not one Rolling Stones concert, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but two. And two successful concerts packed with people coming to see a concert in one of our facilities that we have to showcase. And this year we'll follow that with music festival par none. There's the Junos, the country music awards, the Aboriginal Music Awards.

We host sporting events. They're premier events in this province. We set a new bar for the Grey Cups, for the Briers, for Tournaments of Hearts. We're a province of festivals and fairs, museums, arts, and culture. To name just a few just in our own community, there's the new RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] heritage cultural centre and museum. And the tattoo is coming — a huge extravaganza of protective services and the musical ride, drawing people from all over but showcasing to the rest of this country what we can do right here in Saskatchewan.

Not only that, we're a community with heart. We show that

heart in many ways but one of them that's just been very successful is the Kinsmen Telemiracle. There's been radiothons some of our colleagues have talked about. There's snowmobile rallies across the province and all kinds of local fundraisers where people get together and display their commitment to the community, their caring, their neighbourly interest in each other and to come together to show that they have a spirit of caring about Saskatchewan.

The agricultural world comes here. The world comes here. It's showcased by Agribition, the Farm Progress Show, the Royal Reds.

All of those things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, bring me to something that's very near and dear to my heart because none of those things happen without the commitment of people who want to give back to their community, who serve in their community, see a need there, who want to respond by making their quality of life and their community better for everyone, from those people who have much to those people who need to have much help and support to be actively involved in community. And that's the Premier's voluntary sector initiative.

Now when the Premier asked me, following the Canadian volunteerism initiative, what we could do in Saskatchewan, I quickly got people together and found that there's a lot we could do. The federal government was doing the Canadian volunteerism initiative, and they had a local advisory. They were going to mainly focus on capacity building.

The Premier challenged us to say, what structure could we deploy that would bring together a partnership with collaborative efforts between the voluntary sector and the public sector, and also to appoint a legislative secretary role so that we could profile, we could profile and have awareness of the work of the voluntary sector because we all know that Saskatchewan people enjoy a high quality of life in a vibrant and inclusive province. And it's because of the benefits of those people who come together to provide those kinds of supports that we're able to say that.

So we know that . . . how does the voluntary sector impact on a powerful economic force in this province? Well we have 7,963 voluntary organizations in Saskatchewan that see volunteers donate 80.6 million hours or the equivalent of 41,979 full-time jobs per year in the province. It's 13 per cent of the labour force, and they have revenues of nearly \$3.7 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The voluntary sector initiative had worked very closely with the Canadian volunteerism initiative and recognized capacity building was occurring throughout the regions of the province, and of course we were finding it was quite a blow to the initiative when that was cancelled by the federal government. We're wanting to see how they're going to bring back some of that support in the long term for communities.

We know that many, many of the organizations have some supports from the province that are very historical. They're longstanding commitments through the lottery funds, and there's sport, culture and youth recreation groups that are all over this province that have support from the lottery funds.

And we also know that there are groups who, throughout this province, provide human services through the NGOs [non-governmental organization] or the CBOs [community-based organization] that are hard at work when they've identified the needs in community and pull themselves together and have voluntary sector boards who are addressing those concerns. And as government we wouldn't want to take over the work that they're doing. As a matter of fact rather than doing that, we want to work in partnership and in a collaborative way to understand how we can better address their concerns and their issues.

And I'd urge all members to look for our annual report to the Premier this year. It will be happening close to National Volunteer Week. Much, much work has been done. We're laying the foundation for that collaborative relationship into the future, the way the partnership can work to address some of the issues that have been identified now through a forum we held last fall and through the work we did in community to survey community. And so I'm looking forward to the year ahead where we're going to further that relationship and begin to address those issues in a very positive way.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will always have a song in my heart to sing about the hard work, the dedication, the courage, and the caring of the Saskatchewan voluntary sector. And there's so much more that I would like to be able to highlight of importance there. There's so much in this budget that helps to make quality of life better for Saskatchewan families, and the voluntary sector is a critical and a key part of that.

Well the members opposite have characterized the budget in one way. And they keep saying that, oh well, this is a deficit budget. Well I was talking to a community, and they were saying, well what is this Fiscal Stabilization Fund and why are the members opposite going directly in opposition to banks, bond raters credit agencies, you know, the councils, the economic councils in Canada saying this is a good, balanced budget?

And I said, well they have a real problem. I don't know. Some of them must have a real problem in their own lives thinking this through in that you have your ongoing money for your household. Some years are very, very good years in your household. There's good income. There's maybe some things that have happened that have been able to give us a chance in your household accounting to have a bit more money. Most people do what we've done. They set aside some money for the times maybe that aren't going to be so good or when expectations of people are high and they set aside a savings account. That savings account is part of the household income. It's part of what you do for budgeting.

It just bothers them so much that they don't have the old Liquor and Gaming Fund that they spent ten times over every year we brought it forward. Instead we have a Fiscal Stabilization Fund to do just that. In times of drought, in times of difficult times in agriculture, we've been able to rely on that fund. And as a matter of fact when there's good times, we take that money from the fund and we've been able to — rather than go outside and borrow — borrow sometimes from that fund to save interest costs. This is not a difficult concept. Banks know that. Bond raters know that. Economic people across the country

know that. How hard can that be to grasp? But no, the members opposite can't have anything to say about this budget.

But I'm going to verify it in the local paper, the *Leader-Post*. How do they characterize this budget? Well they say operating expenses this year are \$7.79 billion, debt servicing of \$560 million from the billion dollars each and every year the members opposite overspent when they were Tories — but they're not Tories today — and that there's \$75 million in the General Revenue Fund surplus. Not only that, the *Leader-Post* says that this is the 14th consecutive balanced budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Hamilton: — Well in any constituency across this province, you want to keep in touch with what people are saying, and you want to hear from your constituents. And there are people in each of the constituencies that man constituency offices who are the eyes and ears out to the riding. People call in to the offices, and they keep in close contact with us. And my constituency assistant, Tammy Watt, is no different. She's a warm, welcoming voice on the end of the phone when people want to find out more about something, they want to reach me, or they want to talk to the riding. And I'm very, very thankful for the work that Tammy does.

And then of course, there's your family. I am blessed with so much family. I have my close family — my husband Bob, and my daughter Amber, son Noel — who go out into community, and they keep my feet on the ground because they come back and tell me what they're hearing or what are some of the issues or problems of the day. But I also have in-laws and I have step-in-laws. I have on my father's side — he had remarried — I have stepfamily there. I have the beautiful opportunity in my life to have a daughter who's adopted and found her birth family and so I have that family. And I also have church family who keep you right on the ground there with some of the issues of the day.

And what I'm hearing from them, there's so many parts of this budget that they are really talking about from the very, very young who rely on daycare and all of the additional daycare spaces, to seniors who are looking at this drug plan and saying, wow. And they're saying, you know, we know that every measure you've taken is a measure that you take when it's sustainable because you don't want to be in a position where you do an initiative and then have to pull it back from community. And so they know and they're assured that when we introduce a drug plan for seniors, yes — yes, members of this House; yes, members of community — we take those measures when there's money there, and it is sustainable into the future, social progress into the future.

Well my community, there's so much I want to highlight in this budget, and I'll look to my members to give me wrap-up signals. But in Wascana Plains I'd say probably the number one issue that people ask me to address is keeping young people here at home and giving opportunities for young people and employment opportunities for all people in this province.

And with that, I'm very proud of the measures that are indicated this year that are going to happen in our budget. And the

members opposite, if they were interested in attracting young people, should be telling them that these are good measures to have people want to be employed here, get their jobs here, stay here, come here.

The new five-year \$10,000 annual graduate tax exemption for post-secondary graduates . . . they'll pay no provincial income tax on the first \$20,000 of income. Young people tell me that that's a move that would want them to be here in Saskatchewan. And as a matter of fact friends of my son and daughter are coming home. They're coming back to Saskatchewan. They've got jobs in Saskatchewan, and it doesn't matter where they're educated in this country. They're coming back to Saskatchewan to enjoy the tax exemption that's brought forward in this budget.

For the people in community who have students who are in university, we're freezing university tuition at 2004 levels until 2008. Post-secondary students and their family in my constituency really appreciate that measure, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're providing \$23.7 million for 2,118 new training seats, including 544 additional training opportunities in health and the CareerStart program has an additional almost 1,300 expanding opportunities. The budget funds almost 31,400 — 31,400 — training opportunities, and that's a 24 per cent increase since 2004.

Now the members opposite, if they'd want to get their budget books out when we talk about employment opportunities, employment in this province has risen in each year through 2003 to 2006. In fact in 2006 Saskatchewan achieved the highest level of job creation in the province's history with an average of 491,600 people working in this province.

[20:00]

Over 15,500 jobs have been created in the province since 2003. Employment growth has been particularly strong in the resource and construction sectors, each averaging an annual rate of 8.3 per cent since 2003 and posting growth rates of 15.5 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively in 2006.

Now this is not a secret to anybody because we know our labour force is constructive, but Saskatchewan's labour productivity has consistently ranked as the second-highest in the country throughout 2003-2006. Our unemployment rate is among the lowest in the country, and in 2006 our unemployment rate averaged 4.7 per cent. That's the lowest rate since 1981.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people in Regina Wascana Plains with young people who are coming home, who are employed at home, who have post-secondary education opportunities, appreciate this budget.

When you're looking at encouraging the economy, there are many measures within this budget. I can talk about a few. From personal income tax reform that sees, since 1999, Saskatchewan personal tax reform reducing the provincial personal income taxes on an average Saskatchewan family by \$1,238 from \$3,500, and it's dropped from \$3,500 in an average family, to \$2,300. People paying taxes in Regina Wascana Plains appreciate the personal tax reforms. They've talked about the

tax measures we took last year in being able to stimulate the economy, and they talk about my colleagues who worked hard to change the royalty structures to look at the economic backdrop to this province.

There's so much more that we would want to say about this budget that's so positive, but tonight I would say that attitudes of Saskatchewan people are up. They're positive about this budget everywhere, upbeat, except for the members opposite. I will coin the words of our Minister of Finance who says, "Our communities remain strong, and our infrastructure continues to support the growth of new industries and new jobs throughout this province."

This budget deserves our support, and that's why tonight I stand in support of the budget and speak against the amendment posed by the members opposite.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the hon. member for Weyburn-Big Muddy.

Mr. Duncan: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the Assembly this evening and to be able to take part in the budget debate. It's the first time that I have a chance to comment on the budget as an elected member, and I'm very happy to do so.

But before I comment on the budget, I want to give some thanks to some very important people this evening. First to the people of the constituency that I represent, for allowing me to be a member of this legislature and to have the honour of serving, it's a tremendous honour to represent the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy.

This has been a very, very exciting year. Actually I guess tomorrow is the one-year date of when I was first nominated to run for the Saskatchewan Party. So it's been a very busy year, and I'm grateful to the people of Weyburn-Big Muddy for that opportunity.

An Hon. Member: — That was a great night.

Mr. Duncan: — I also . . . It was a great night. And I want to thank, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my wife, Amanda. She's back home at Weyburn, and she's been a tremendous amount of support and encouragement for me in this last year and through the almost eight years that we've been married. And she's always been supportive of things that I want to do and accomplish in my life.

And I see it's a little after 8 o'clock. And we're in the middle of renovations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and so she's probably painting right now. We're on to the basement, and she's probably got another three or four hours of painting left in her for this evening. So hopefully when I get home tonight, she'll be done painting. And I thank her for all her support.

And I want to thank my constituency assistants: Marcie Swedburg who is on a much deserved holiday this week, and Marilyn Charlton who is filling in this week. I thank them for all their help.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do want to offer my congratulations to my seatmate, the member from Martensville. She's going to be a tremendous member of this legislature for many years to come. And you know, if only she'd get off her feet a little more, Mr. Speaker, and add to the debate. You know, she's a little bit shy off the beginning, but, you know, I think she'll get into it pretty soon.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do have to comment on today. It was a little bit odd. You know, we were asking some questions, and then my seatmate was asking some questions on the whole Carriere scandal. And the member, the minister, the member for Saskatoon Nutana, she said, you know, she didn't want to answer any questions on that and their terrible handling of that matter.

She wanted us to ask questions on their terrible handling of rural Saskatchewan and the closures that are going to happen in rural Saskatchewan. And I hope to see her on her feet in question period tomorrow perhaps asking some questions of her own government if she's that passionate about the issue of rural Saskatchewan and school closures, and maybe get back into the feel of opposition where I'm sure she'll be very shortly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my short time as a member of this legislature, I've heard numerous government members, including in this budget debate, they want to give members opposite lessons on fiscal management and prudence and even some of their own personal recollections of when they first came into government in 1991 and some of the difficult decisions that had to be made by the Romanow administration and the MacKinnon budget, the Romanow-MacKinnon budgets of those years.

And in fact, Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, in my maiden speech I talked a bit about why I feel that the party opposite is not right for the future of our province is because they look back so much. And I believe the member for Saskatoon Nutana in her reply to that Throne Speech, she gave me somewhat of a history lesson. She thought it was important that I know a little bit of the history of this Chamber. She spoke of her time in those early cabinets and in that early government and some of the discussions and the tough decisions that had to be made.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will say that I listened very closely to that minister. And in fact when those members opposite want to rise in the Assembly and talk about those difficult decisions, I listened very closely cause I think they have a lot to add on the subject of prudence and fiscal responsibility from some of their experiences in past governments.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after sitting through deficit 2007, I'm no longer prepared to sit in this Assembly and take fiscal prudence lessons from that government opposite.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Duncan: — Not after they delivered a \$700 million deficit. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at best, at best this is a tired old NDP government that is recklessly spending money to win re-election— at best. At worst, at the worst, Mr. Speaker, they have lost all regard for the taxpayers of this province and they

are . . . at worst they don't care what happens after the next election. If it's a new government, it's the new government's problems. And if it's that same old tired NDP government, that for some reason does return, then we'll see a replay of 2003 where they'll raise taxes. They didn't talk about it before, but they'll raise taxes.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of how hard this tired old NDP government tries, this budget is a deficit budget — a \$700 million deficit. And I know the Minister of Labour, he likes to follow along, and I'm looking at the budget performance plan summary, pages 50 and 51, bottom of the page 50, revenue, \$7.8693 billion; expenses on the next page, \$8.349730 billion.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm not exactly sure of how the government goes through the budgeting process. I think the cabinet ministers decide how much money they need — they take it to the Finance minister — to run their departments. And at the end of the day the cabinet, they decide on what the budget will be, and at some point they share that with their caucus.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after seeing these numbers, I can't believe that not one member of that government didn't say, wait a minute, what are we doing here? What are we doing here after some of the credibility that we built up, that that government built up? What are they doing? And I can't believe that members of that government didn't see the problems in this budget, that it is actually a deficit budget.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the members opposite, they're spinning this budget pretty hard. And they have to because pretty much everybody is against this budget. But I found it very interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that to give credibility, some credibility to their budget, who are they quoting? They're quoting the big banks. Can you imagine that? The NDP are quoting the big chartered banks. And I guess, you know, they haven't totally, you know, the big corporations haven't totally taken over the most profitable parts of our economy. They still have time to look at this budget. But I can't believe that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a deficit budget. It doesn't matter how you cut it. And actually, Thursday afternoon I went back to Weyburn after the budget. It was Thursday afternoon, and I had a meeting in my office. And I stopped in the office and told Marcie . . . because you know, we'd gone over lunch and I hadn't eaten yet, so I was going to go out and get a bite to eat before my appointment came in. And I went to a coffee shop in Weyburn, and a place they serve pizza and coffee and doughnuts, and I went to get something to eat. And two gentlemen stopped me. They stopped me in the coffee shop. And they had heard on the radio and they came over to me. And they couldn't believe that this government was running a deficit budget. They couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe it, and I know they don't want to believe it. It's in their own books though. Revenues 7.8 billion, expenses 8.3 — that's a deficit.

And I know the member from Coronation Park, last night he informed us you know — he was pretty animated — that he thought that members on this side couldn't read a simple financial statement. But you know he might have a bit of trouble because I know in his speech, I know in his speech, he said when he was in school they used to stop class, Mr.

Speaker, to look at semis going by the school, so maybe he missed a bit in accounting or math or whatever class it was. But this a deficit budget.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the last couple of years — and they've been some pretty good years for our province — we've had record government revenue in terms of additional oil revenue, and our natural resources have provided for our province, and this government they put some money aside. Well first of all, they didn't really put money aside; it was more like a credit card. And then last year they did decide to put some money aside, but they did that. And then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fact in this Chamber, the Premier said in 2002, and I quote, "Money aside in a savings account for the rainy day. And when the rainy day came, we've used it."

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, in deficit 2007, the government has spent a majority of that rainy day fund, at a time of what they will say is a boom time in our province. And yet they're spending the rainy day fund, over \$500 million taken from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just three years ago, the former minister of Finance, the member for Regina Douglas Park, he said, on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, he said, quote, "We are weaning ourselves from relying on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, our rainy day account." And I end the quote. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this has been quite an expensive weaning process that this government has gone through. Over \$500 million taken from the rainy day fund, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it makes it hard to believe that deficit 2007 is making the people of this province long for that Finance minister. That's how bad this budget is.

In fact according to the government's own 2000-2001 budget, and I'll quote from that budget: "In years when fiscal challenges are great, the government will use fund withdrawals to stay focused on [its] long-term plans . . ." Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only fiscal challenge today is that NDP government's reckless, runaway spending. That's the only fiscal challenge in this province.

Now there's a bit of confusion. We've talked about this a little earlier; members opposite will talk about it. There's a bit of confusion of how to properly read the government's budget. They'll dispute that it's an actual \$700 million deficit in the summary financial statements. Well here's what the auditor says. This is from a press release, or actually a statement given to the media on the 2004 auditor's report. And he said:

The summary financial plan also improves the Government's accountability by allowing legislators and the public to assess whether its financial performance is better or worse than what was planned.

I encourage legislators and the public to look for this information when the Government provides its quarterly updates . . .

[20:15]

And then it goes on to say:

Rather than focusing on the GRF which only reports part of the Government's operations, you should look to see how the Government is performing against its financial plan for the entire Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even the government's own document, budget document — this, the book that I'm holding — it's a *Budget and Performance Plan Summary*. And I'll encourage the members to turn to page 61. And this document says, "The Summary Financial Budget combines all organizations on a modified equity basis for the purposes of calculating the Government's surplus." But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this case we know it's not a surplus. It is a deficit, but the government won't give the people of Saskatchewan a clear answer on this.

They keep saying it's not a deficit, but I guess the only person that the government will admit that it is a deficit to is apparently Don Newman. Don Newman, host of CBC Newsworld's *Politics*, said to the Minister of Finance, "But you're going to spend more money in the coming fiscal year than you're going to collect." The Minister of Finance says, "Yes, that's right." And Don Newman says, "Is that not called a deficit in Saskatchewan?" And even the Minister of Finance, he won't admit it to the people of the province, but he'll go on TV, on national television and he'll say, well it's a surplus actually on the GRF [General Revenue Fund], but it is on the summary financial a deficit. The Finance minister admits it.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on. I got pages here of what people say — pages. Randy Burton, *StarPhoenix*, "When you look at it all together it's a very expensive campaign platform that no government is going to be able to afford in the long run." Murray Mandryk says, "It's hard to see anything particularly good emerge from the numbers presented by the New Democratic finance minister."

Leader-Post editorial, "The key issue is affordability." And they go on and say, "Budgets are about making hard, but responsible, choices and there's a real question mark over whether this big-spending political budget is sustainable." *StarPhoenix* editorial, "Thursday's budget by the Lorne Calvert government was a giant step in the wrong direction."

I could go on, and I think I will. You know it's interesting. They like to quote the big banks saying that it is a balanced budget. What do the chartered accountants say? The chartered accountants association:

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 our taxes mostly go into, it's about \$480 million deficit.

Now that's from the chartered accountants, which I think they would know a little bit about accounting. You would think that they would know about accounting. And the chamber of commerce, they talk about how this is a 9 per cent spending increase and yet revenues aren't increasing that fast.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the middle of a boom the only ones experiencing a rainy day in this province is the government opposite. They know they're in tough. We got an election coming. In fact the Minister of Finance says, don't worry; this

budget is sustainable. He says it's sustainable. So let's check the government's projections to see how sustainable it is. Let's go to the projections.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see projections on the price of potash over the next two years. I see projections on the price of oil over the next two years. I don't see the projections from this Finance minister though. It's harder for him to say to the people of this province, just trust us; everything's going to be fine. Just trust us. The people of this province have heard that long enough from this government, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Now I would like to talk . . . I'm not sure how much time I got left. Am I all right? Yes, I got a couple minutes left. And I want to talk about . . . You know, obviously, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm in this Chamber today because of the good people of Weyburn-Big Muddy and the message that they sent in the by-election. And my seatmate also is here because of a very decisive by-election win. And those are really the last two major tests for this government of what the people of the province feel.

Now taken alone they tell very different stories. Obviously one seat is, you know, very good for our party historically over the last 10 years, and one other has been a bit of a tougher race. So let's add the two numbers together. If you add both by-elections together, the government . . . of the votes cast, the governing party got less than 19 per cent. Less than one in five people put their confidence in that party. And I think that's very indicative of what's going to happen in the next provincial election, whenever they decide to call it.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my final remaining moments I do want to talk . . . I'll give a bit of credit. I don't think it was probably the best way to do it, but the Finance minister in offering the new graduate tax exemption, it's a bit of a step in the right direction. But from their own documents, there's going to be 10,000 graduates but only 4,000 new jobs so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you do the math. I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could figure out how well that's going to work for the people, the young people of this province. But I'll give them credit; it's the first meaningful step towards young people, towards keeping young people in our province that we've seen from this government in 16 years. So you know they're a little late to the party, but it's good to see them.

Now they've done . . . And if you look at past budget speeches, past budget addresses, past throne speeches there's been very little talk about growing the province, about making sure that this is a place, you know, for young people to stay. Now this last Throne Speech they did get the message, but that was after a by-election loss and after some polling that finally, you know, they got the picture that this is an important issue for the people of this province.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it reminds me of this government on the issue of population and youth retention. It reminds me of a quote I recently got. Each Friday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I receive The Family Place newsletter. It's a community-based organization in Weyburn that does terrific work for the young people of our community, and each newsletter ends with a thought for the week. And a couple of weeks ago this was the thought of the week, and it was, "Failure is less a crime than

low ambition." And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government has had not a lot of ambition for the young people of our province, for keeping them in the province.

And you know had they set some real goals over the last 16 years about keeping young people in this province, even if they didn't make those goals I think the people would have gave them credit. At least they tried. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they haven't even tried. They haven't even tried.

And I could go through other issues about property tax relief, how, you know, they betray the people of this province. They've said that they were going to provide some long-term help for property taxpayers, and they haven't done that. It's been band-aids — band-aids on agriculture and on health care and on post-secondary education.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me today at the rally that was held outside, and the Minister of Learning was standing up and talking about all the things that their government was trying to do. And one of the people that attended the rally — I'm not sure which community she was from — but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard her say from behind me, she said when the Minister of Learning was speaking, this lady said, I knew we should have brought our shovels today. And that's exactly what the people of this province are saying. They can't really trust what this government is saying anymore. They've lost confidence. They've lost confidence because this budget shows that they're losing credibility with the people of this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to close here. I haven't got to everything I want to say, and we'll have . . . members this side want to talk more. But I want to close with something that a current member of this House once said in this Assembly. And I'll quote:

. . . when a government has lost the confidence of the people, when it has lost its credibility and demonstrates as much in a budget address, then it's time to defeat that government. It's time to put into place in government a group of women and men who will . . . restore confidence, not only to the budgetary process and the financial management of our province but confidence to our people in what we can do and be in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier of the province spoke those words in April of 1990. He spoke it about the former Conservative administration. Mr. Speaker, those words hold as true today as they did back then. And for that reason, and other reasons that members have talked about, I will be supporting the amendment, and I will not be supporting the \$700 million deficit budget. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the hon. member for Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today and honoured to stand and enter into the budget debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, representing the constituents of Regina Dewdney is an honour that I take very seriously and one that I am very proud of. Mr. Deputy Speaker,

few people ever have the opportunity in public life to represent the people, to be elected to represent the people of the province. And it is a duty and a responsibility that I take extremely seriously, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Before I start my remarks I'd like to congratulate the new member for Martensville. She has tremendous shoes to fill, and she sets a new precedent I believe in this Assembly being the daughter of a former member. And her father served this Assembly in a very, very exceptional way, and I am sure that she will do the same.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we talk about the budget, this is a budget that is built upon a foundation that took many years to build. Before you can have the opportunity to spend money on social programs, you first must build an economy which produces the revenue in which to spend, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This budget, after many years of hard work, allows us for the first time to put in place some very significant new social policy directions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the last number of years this government has cut taxes. It's built its foundation. It's built the economy to where we are today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year alone more than one-half billion dollars will be paid less in taxes by the people and businesses of this province. That includes \$340 million in sales tax. In October of last year, October 27, the Finance minister stood and announced the 2 per cent cut in the sales tax, saving every Saskatchewan family approximately \$300.

This year alone, we're seeing significant tax cuts in corporate and business taxes to the tune of about \$155 million. On top of that we're seeing property tax cuts of \$107 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is all possible because of the great foundation that has been built over the last number of years that has allowed our economy to grow at an unprecedented rate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're also indexing benefits under The Income Tax Act so that bracket creep doesn't take away that benefit of those tax breaks from Saskatchewan families.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is all possible because of a belief that you cannot have economic prosperity without first building that good economy. But out of economic prosperity should come social progress.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — The people of the province should benefit from the well-being of its province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's what this budget is about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget will see two very significant new programs put in place. One is a program that will cap prescription drugs for seniors at a maximum of \$15 per prescription. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a very significant, significant advancement for the well-being of our seniors.

These people are responsible for making our province what it is. Seniors are responsible for building the foundation in which this great province has become what it is. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's only fair and right that they have the opportunity to benefit from their hard work and the many years they have put forward

in this province making it what it is. Seniors built this province, and now it's our opportunity to reward them for what they've done for us. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of them, we have what we have today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are those who think this plan is not the appropriate thing to do, that the money could be spent better in other ways. But Mr. Speaker, being government is about making choices, and it's about rewarding those who deserve to be rewarded. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our seniors most definitely deserve to be rewarded. Because of them today, we have what we have, and we have the opportunities that we have.

[20:30]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have also taken steps towards keeping our young people here, creating opportunities for young people and creating a future so that those young people can see their future here in this province. We've done that in a number of ways, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But fundamentally we've done it by creating a new graduated tax credit that will allow young people to earn up to \$20,000 per year before they pay tax over a five-year period in the province of Saskatchewan. That is up to \$100,000 over five years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is significant. And there are individuals say well that isn't significant, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is. You have to do what you can do within the financial means you have, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are focused on keeping our young people here.

I'm a father of three children, all of which I hope will make their careers in the province of Saskatchewan, all of which are going to university today in the province of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's for them we need to make decisions, not for those of us who sit in this House today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've also frozen tuition at the 2004 levels, making education more affordable for each and every child in this province. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that represents a savings of approximately \$1,500 per year. That in itself is quite significant as young people struggle to pay for the costs of going to school. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have responsibility as a government and a responsibility as parents to try to ensure that every young person has every opportunity they can to be as successful as possible as they move forward in life.

This budget also includes more than 31,000 training spaces — a 24 per cent increase in the last three years alone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's about putting your money where your mouth is. It's about indicating that those young people are important, and the training opportunities for those young people in our province is our priority. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government put its money where its mouth is. It's moving forward, creating new training spaces for young people, creating new opportunities for our children right here in the province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're even going further in a number of ways. We're putting \$3 million into literacy funding to ensure that every young person and every adult has the opportunity to make sure that they have the greatest possibility to reach their potential in this province. We're increasing by another 500 new, licensed child daycare spaces in the province, bringing the total

to 9,300. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is significant but even more significant in an environment where the federal government has continually cut back in child care, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But this province decided to fully fund and move forward in these programs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is significant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about what this province's greatest gift to Canada is — health care. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there isn't a nation in the world or a province in Canada that isn't struggling to bring quality health care to its citizens. It doesn't matter if you're living in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, or any of the G8 [Group of Eight] countries in the world, or any province in Canada. Mr. Deputy Speaker, every jurisdiction is struggling to bring quality health care to its citizens. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this province we're continuing to build on the best and most qualified health care system in the world.

Medicare was the invention, the creation, the gift of the people of Saskatchewan to Canada, and we are continuing to improve upon it. We're going to provide 3,117 more MRIs [magnetic resonance imaging] this year. We're going to provide 5,455 more bone mineral density scans. We're going to increase cardiac catheterization, lab and renal dialysis clinic services. And we're going to provide \$1.6 million more for hip and knee replacements for a total of 3,275 procedures this year alone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to increase funding to the cancer agency by 17 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when inflation's 2 per cent, we're increasing funding to the cancer agency by 17 per cent, recognizing the importance of health care for our citizens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this year we're also going to spend an unprecedented amount in capital. We are going to spend \$534.8 million on roads, on buildings, on schools, on health care facilities so that we can increase the infrastructure to deliver the services to our people in this province. On top of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're increasing transfers — unconditional transfers — to municipalities by \$30 million to a record \$127.3 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well as providing \$58.2 million for municipal infrastructure.

And we're doing this at the same time as paying down \$158 million in debt this year. Over the last four years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will have achieved paying off nearly \$1 billion of provincial debt. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government's made a commitment to move forward in the interests of the people of Saskatchewan, and this budget does just that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're also continuing to increase Saskatchewan assistance plan rates by \$10. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're continuing to put our actions where our mouth is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're doing that in an environment where we now have 16 consecutive credit upgrades — 16 consecutive credit upgrades, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We're going to have a surplus of \$75 million in General Revenue Fund this year. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to have economic growth predicted at about 2.9 per cent and about 2.6 per cent next year, Mr. Speaker — significant economic growth. The province is continuing to prosper and move forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is all possible because of the hard

work of the people of the province of Saskatchewan but also about the right choices having been made, about having a plan to move forward. Saskatchewan today is a have province. Saskatchewan today is sitting among the top two and three provinces in this country in its fiscal position.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, outside of Alberta we have the lowest sales tax in Canada. Mr. Deputy Speaker, today we pay \$1,200 a year less in income tax for a family of four of \$50,000 than we did just four years ago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that's about this province moving forward and putting its resources to its people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, government debt on March 31, 2008, is forecast to be \$7.3 billion. Just a few years ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that debt was more than \$4 billion larger. Mr. Deputy Speaker, debt-to-GDP ratio is 23.8 per cent today compared to 69.8 per cent in 1993. Mr. Deputy Speaker, think of the significant progress that's been made in some very difficult times. It took significant determination to make the tough choices that were necessary to move this economy forward and then to put those choices forward in economic reality for its people and returning in both tax cuts and new programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of this province are seeing unprecedented good times in the province. We're booming like we never have before. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's absolutely no sense having a boom if the people of the province do not feel the benefit of that boom. So this budget is returning to the people of Saskatchewan significant money in the form of the 2 per cent sales tax cut, in the form of corporation and small business tax cuts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in the form of property tax cuts to both agricultural lands and residential and commercial properties across the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's been \$260 million in annual tax savings as a result of the personal income tax changes made a number of years ago, resulting in significant savings to families.

As this government has been able to turn the province's fiscal situation around, it has returned those dollars to its citizens. And that's the responsibility of any government, to return the benefit of the wealth to the people who own that wealth, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we live today in a province that has the most affordable cost of living. We have the opportunity, by virtue of owning Crown corporations, to have the most affordable, most affordable natural gas, water, telephone, power, and utilities throughout the province, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And those, those are as a result of choices made by this government and by the people of the province. We had promised the lowest-cost bundle of utilities. We have delivered on that and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to deliver as we move forward.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there's a lot of controversy about this budget, but I'd like to just basically deal with this in one way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to let the judgment, whether this budget is sustainable, be to those who are the experts. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to talk about what the bond rating agencies and the banks are saying about this budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the national bank called the Calvert fiscal plan “Saskatchewan’s 14th straight budget showing a surplus.” That’s the national bank, Mr. Speaker; that’s not the NDP government. The national bank called it a balanced budget — 14th straight balanced budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, CIBC [Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce] said, “Program spending will grow by a lean 1.4 per cent.” And the Bank of Montreal gave the province “. . . top marks for its commitment to cutting taxes, [and] keeping spending in check . . .” Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And I think Michael Gregory of BMO Capital Markets says it best: “. . . when it comes to financial management, the Saskatchewan government is at the top of its class . . .” Mr. Deputy Speaker. Michael Gregory spends his days analyzing the budgets of governments across Canada, it says. He says, Saskatchewan’s “. . . budget continues a fine tradition.”

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.” That isn’t the government saying that, Mr. Speaker. That is BMO Capital Markets’ Michael Gregory saying that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don’t know. I’m not going to question the experts who say this. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that, combined with 16 straight credit rating upgrades, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaks for itself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it’s not up to you or I to determine what the financial institutions and the bond rating agencies think of our budgets. They do it for themselves. They don’t want to hear our opinion. They don’t want to hear the opinion of the opposition. They’ll make their own decision. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although the members opposite don’t believe that this budget’s a good budget, there are many out there who do, including the bond rating agencies, including the banks and the financial markets.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for those reasons and for many others — because this budget represents the values of Saskatchewan people, it represents putting forward the values and needs of our senior citizens and our young people — for those reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be supporting the budget and opposing the amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the hon. member from Moosomin.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, certainly at this time of the night you often wonder how many people are really paying attention. I wonder if people out are observing as clearly as the members across the floor are observing this debate or the members in the Assembly. But I can tell you this, from past experience I’ve had people call and — while I was still on my feet — correct me when I made a mistake, so I’ve got to be careful tonight, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we look at the budget that was presented, budget 2007, we can’t help but think that with

everything going for it the government has certainly created a situation where the people of Saskatchewan, I believe, in many cases are disappointed. In a time of a boom, the NDP has actually blown that boom. It’s gone on a reckless spending spree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the taxpayers’ credit card in a desperate attempt, I would suggest, to again buy votes.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over the past number of years in the opportunities I’ve had to sit in this Assembly, I’ve witnessed many changes that have taken place from the personnel in the Assembly. And let me say first of all a special welcome to the member from Martensville and we certainly look forward to her contribution not only in the Assembly. I was a good friend of her father’s, and I’ve already seen that she certainly is going to follow and fill her father’s shoes very well. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of course we know the member from Weyburn has already shown us his abilities as well.

But when we talk about the budget and we look at where this government is going, I can’t help but think back a few elections. And we don’t even have to go that far back, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We just have to go back to the 2003 election and the promises that were made just prior to that election.

And as we follow the debate even in the most recent federal budget . . . and the Premier has been complaining, this government has been complaining about broken promises. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker we have seen the NDP government in the past promise one thing, then go through an election and say oops, made a mistake; we spent a little too much money, sorry. What happened in 2003 . . . the first budget presented after the ’03 election was an increase in the provincial sales tax.

So that as we get closer to the 2007 . . . maybe in a few days, Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe it’s in the fall. Whatever the scenario, the NDP are going to say yes, but we reduced it 2 percent. However people need to remember they increased it 2 percent. They don’t even have to remember the 2 percent increase and then the decrease. They just need to take a look as well at the current budget and the fact that this government is running a \$700 million deficit. And the facts and the budgetary document speaks for itself, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[20:45]

So what are they doing, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What’s this Minister of Finance speaking from his chair? And I appreciate the comments and the suggestions that are coming from the minister because it certainly makes it a lot easier to get into the debate in the Assembly when there’s added advice.

\$700 million additional spending, a deficit, and yet does that make things better for the people of the province of Saskatchewan? How much better are the people in general going to be? Well the minister says, yes it makes people better. Well some seniors are, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are no doubt going to believe that they’re better off today than they were yesterday. Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they will find out come July 1 that where they had thought they were better off, they really won’t be better off.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I look at the Moosomin constituency and I look at the challenges facing people across the Moosomin

constituency . . . Let me first of all say I really appreciate my staff, Tina and Audrey. And over the years, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all get to appreciate the staff that work in our offices. And we all appreciate our families, our wives and our children, and even our grandchildren. And certainly this past year we've had the pleasure of a grandchild being brought into our family, and we're certainly enjoying that little granddaughter. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we look forward to enjoying her company and grandchildren down the road as they bring enjoyment into the home. It's certainly — and I notice a number of other members agreeing — grandchildren are . . . Well in fact someone said to me recently, you know, you should have had the grandchildren first. Now that might have been somewhat complicated, but yes, grandchildren are certainly a pleasure to have in the home.

But when I talk about a grandchild I think to myself, well, what is this budget going to do for them down the road? We need to . . . As we look at the province of Saskatchewan and we all believe that we live in a province with certainly so much potential and so much opportunity. And we look at the most recent budget and yet we look at some of the editorials, some of the comments that have been written since the presentation of the budget. And I'm just going to read a couple comments. One of the columnists in *The StarPhoenix* says, ". . . when you look at it all together, it's very expensive campaign platform that no government is going to be able to afford to run in the long run."

A second columnist said:

Sadly, the numbers in the 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, are a bit scary.

And that's why my colleagues and I have been pointing out to the people of Saskatchewan that this budget that has been presented by the Minister of Finance most recently in the Assembly is more than what it appears to be on the surface. And many of the media outlets and — as I found the other day when I was out touring my constituency — many of my constituents are beginning to see through it as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'd just like to speak a little bit about the impact this budget has or doesn't have on my constituents. And first of all, let me talk about schools. And many MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] today had the privilege of meeting representatives who came in from different communities across the province. And in some cases—I would add, Mr. Deputy Speaker — individuals came in through some very difficult weather conditions. It's quite interesting, and I think over the past number of years, a period of years, any time we've had a public demonstration, it's what I've noted. Well the day before can be beautiful; the day of the demonstration has turned out to be atrocious. And today was no different.

And yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these people cared about their communities. They were concerned about their communities. They were concerned about the educational opportunities. And what was on their minds was not only a place for their children — and might I add possibly their grandchildren — a place for them to get an education, but also the fact of having an opportunity with economic growth which they're looking for of

a school still being available in their community for children, for parents to be able to place their children in and see them receive an education.

So I would like to say to each and every one of the individuals who came in, thank you so much. And I certainly want to compliment you for taking the time to speak out on behalf of your community and your school.

As we talk about the Save Our Schools rally, I'd just like to read a couple comments that were in one of the most recent papers, comment talking about the provincial budget that had ". . . plans to increase government departmental spending by more than \$640 million — and not one thin dime is directly dedicated to addressing the issue of school closures." He says:

Wouldn't the budget have been the perfect opportunity to address this issue?

Evidently not.

While there is a nine-per-cent overall increase in spending in the 2007-08 provincial budget, spending in the Department of Learning is only rising by 41.7 million, or 5.4 per cent.

And the Minister of Finance chirps from his seat about spending too much. I guess my comment to the Minister of Finance is priorities. And that's exactly what this columnist is talking about — priorities of government spending, priorities that didn't meet the needs and the issues that were brought to the forefront of the Legislative Assembly today.

The columnist also said it raises a pretty fundamental question about where education rates on this NDP government's priority list. And then we also were aware of the information that was presented to us by David Gleim of Chaplin. The columnist goes on to say it should be right up there, education should be right up there with health, and it baffles me. This is a socialist government, and the history of the CCF-NDP [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party] has always been that education was a priority. But I want to leave us with one comment that he ends up the column with where he says:

Despite a huge nine-per-cent increase in spending, there still doesn't appear to be a plan or money to keep smaller community schools open. And with most NDP MLAs representing urban seats where rural school closures are a non-issue, there's less reason to believe either will be forthcoming.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that speaks for itself. And even for the people who took the time to come to the Assembly today . . . they made the trip. I believe they laid out a sound reason as to why we need to look at education, how we educate our children, why we need small rural schools.

And I would like to add personally that I'm very pleased with the number of the communities in my constituency who were facing reviews. And I would like to say that many of these communities very deliberately took the time to bring forward, at the public meetings, all the positive reasons why their schools should remain open from the fact of how well students have

been educated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had students leave our small schools and have achieved tremendously at the university or the SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] levels, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They've gone on and they've done well in the professional fields, which certainly speaks well for how our teachers have devoted themselves to educating our young people.

And when I look at Kennedy Langbank and Glenavon and Wapella, and the parents who came in, the school board members, and how hard they worked, I need to compliment them for their hard work and their dedication to their community. And that's why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague has talked about our plan of schools of necessity.

And one of the individuals I ran into was chatting with, or a couple of them at the rally, were talking about the fact of young people being on lengthy bus rides, and that's what schools of necessity plays to, or schools of opportunity. I look at the one community, Kennedy Langbank, and there's a couple . . . a manufacturing plant that is looking at expanding and doubling the number of people employed there. So you wonder why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people are concerned about whether schools are open or not. It's because of the fact that we are seeing opportunities open up, greater opportunities for young people to come back to Saskatchewan despite what the government is doing. There are businesses who are creating opportunities for young people to look at coming back and investing in our small communities, but they need to have the services available.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we look at the budget presented to us today, and I can't help but think of the health needs of our constituency. And there's no doubt that many of the members in this Assembly face the same challenges.

One of the biggest challenges is recruitment of doctors to fill our hospitals and to meet the service needs. And yet what did we see in this budget? I think there were four more seats for training for doctors which is falling short, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of ensuring that we have the quality professionals in our hospitals, in our local communities to meet the needs. And in many cases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the communities I represent, our communities are actually seeing an increase in population. So that speaks well for those communities but it also speaks for the need not only for doctors; we have a need for nurses. What did we get? Eighteen new nursing seats. LPNs [licensed practical nurse], 15 new LPN positions within this budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we have to ask ourselves, what are the government's priorities? And why, with the surplus the government had to work with, why did they choose to spend it in the way they did and forgot about putting in place the funding that would allow for more professionals to enter the field, especially in health care, to meet the needs of people across Saskatchewan? Not just urban Saskatchewan but rural Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must also acknowledge the fact that people in the Moosomin and surrounding area are certainly pleased to see the way the construction is moving forward on the new hospital in Moosomin. And everyone is waiting with

bated breath to see that construction completed even though it costs them an arm and a leg for that facility to move forward because of the fact that they have to find 35 per cent of the capital costs plus furnish the facility.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people in our community are following this budget very carefully as well.

And I think one of the issues that has come up very currently in the last couple of days . . . and yesterday I had the privilege of stopping in at one of the reserves and talking to the band council for a few moments. And one of the issues they brought forward was the need for dialysis in the Broadview area. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, here again let me talk about the fact of how communities and how surrounding areas work together. Over the years we've had communities fighting with each other for a service. But in this case the Broadview community and all the bands in the area plus the RMs [rural municipality] and the surrounding towns said, you know, it's only right that people who need dialysis and that service should . . . there should be something closer for them.

Now the Minister of Health, when we were debating it last fall, said, well those people are receiving the service; they're getting care, aren't they? And yes, they are currently, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But unfortunately the Minister of Health forgot about the fact — or whether he forgot or conveniently forgot — forgot that for people in rural communities it's a substantial cost and burden to them for the cost of obtaining that dialysis service.

Many of these people are elderly people. They have to hire someone to drive them in or drive them to the destination — whether it's Yorkton, whether it's Regina. And there's meals and there's other needs. And I've seen some of the figures, and the figures are well into the 10, \$15,000 a year coming out of a person's pocket just so they can get a service that I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would all say they have a right to receive. So would it not be practical to put a dialysis unit in the Broadview area that would be more focal and would certainly help meet the needs and take away from the stress of having to be on the roads? And we saw today what types of conditions people drive in to, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think those are some things that people are just saying, that's the right thing to do.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a couple of the members on the government's side were talking as well about the drug plan they introduced. And yes, for a lot of people that drug plan is going to certainly improve their lives. However in many cases, Mr. Speaker, many people already qualify for the low end and don't pay much towards the drugs. So was \$15 going to make much of a difference for some of these people? Probably not.

But it's \$15 per prescription. So how many prescriptions are you going to . . . like what's the cost? If you've got three prescriptions to fill, that's \$45 — not 15. And I think that's some of the issues that people are going to find when this drug plan, if it does come into play, is not going to be the carrot that they thought it was going to be. And when the facts begin, start to become public and the reality of what it is becomes public, many people are going to be disappointed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as well this government talks about a

universality of health care, medicare. Saskatchewan is the home of medicare. Saskatchewan is the home of universal health care. Well this drug plan is not universal if you look at it in the overall scheme of things. It picks on a certain group of individuals. And yes I believe it was the member from Regina Dewdney who talked about our seniors building our provinces. Yes even some of the seniors I've talked to are quite concerned about how the government spends the taxpayers' money and where they're putting the money, how it meets the needs of individuals.

[21:00]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's also important for people to realize that the \$15 drug plan only works or deals with drugs that are already under the formulary. So what does it do for additional drug costs or drugs that come on the scene? In fact we've seen certain drugs — cancer drugs — right now that still aren't on the formulary, that people are paying the total cost upfront. So what does it do for individuals like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

And now the Minister of Health was saying, well should we pay for all of these drugs? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government opposite just told us that this is such a good plan. It's going to help everybody. Well maybe it's time we got all of the information out so people had a better understanding of what this drug plan is going to cost you for the people of Saskatchewan because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe when people begin to read between the lines and understand what it is, they're not going to be so excited about the \$15 drug fee that this government is bringing forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could go on in so many areas. We can talk about highways. We can talk about highways, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I look at my constituency, and the Minister of Highways recently announced more funding for highways. Then the minister also talked about a council or a body that they would be talking to, to develop a more contingent plan about meeting the needs of or addressing the needs of highways.

And yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the minister — over the years we've had debates in the Assembly — and the minister has commented about the regional economic development authorities and southeast transportation authority for example, southwest. And one has to ask, why would you have to establish a new transportation authority? You already have one there. Unfortunately you haven't been listening very well to the recommendations that have been coming from many of these transportation authorities.

In my constituency for example, had they been following the guidelines, had they been listening very carefully, No. 48 Highway from the Manitoba border right through to Kipling would be basically completed.

And we talk about tourism. We talk about economic development. We talk about growing the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There's a prime example of, had the southeast transportation authority's recommendations been followed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would generate economic growth. We would grow our area, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We could go on to other areas, whether it's Highway 47 or different communities, whether it's the grid system in the province and RMs and the difficulties they're having.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think, as we look at this budget, as the people of Saskatchewan take a careful look at this budget, they're going to see it for what it is. They're going to see that it's just an unscrupulous party looking to revitalize itself in the views of the electorate, hoping to salvage another election victory.

And I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are seeing through this budget, and they're going to turn thumbs down, not only to this budget, but to this government when they screw up the courage to call the next provincial election. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Relations.

Hon. Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm conscious of the hour, that it's 9 o'clock. Most members start their day by 8:30 in the morning, and most members will have a break during the supper hour to touch base with their families, to return phone calls, deal with emails. But today, because of the dinner put on by the Saskatchewan legislative interns, members did not have that opportunity. And I think in fairness, rather than starting my remarks, I move at this point that we adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — The Minister of Government Relations has moved adjournment of debate. Is that motion agreed to?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — That is carried. I recognize the Government House Leader.

Hon. Mr. Hagel: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt that motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Prebble): — That is carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 21:02.]

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