



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

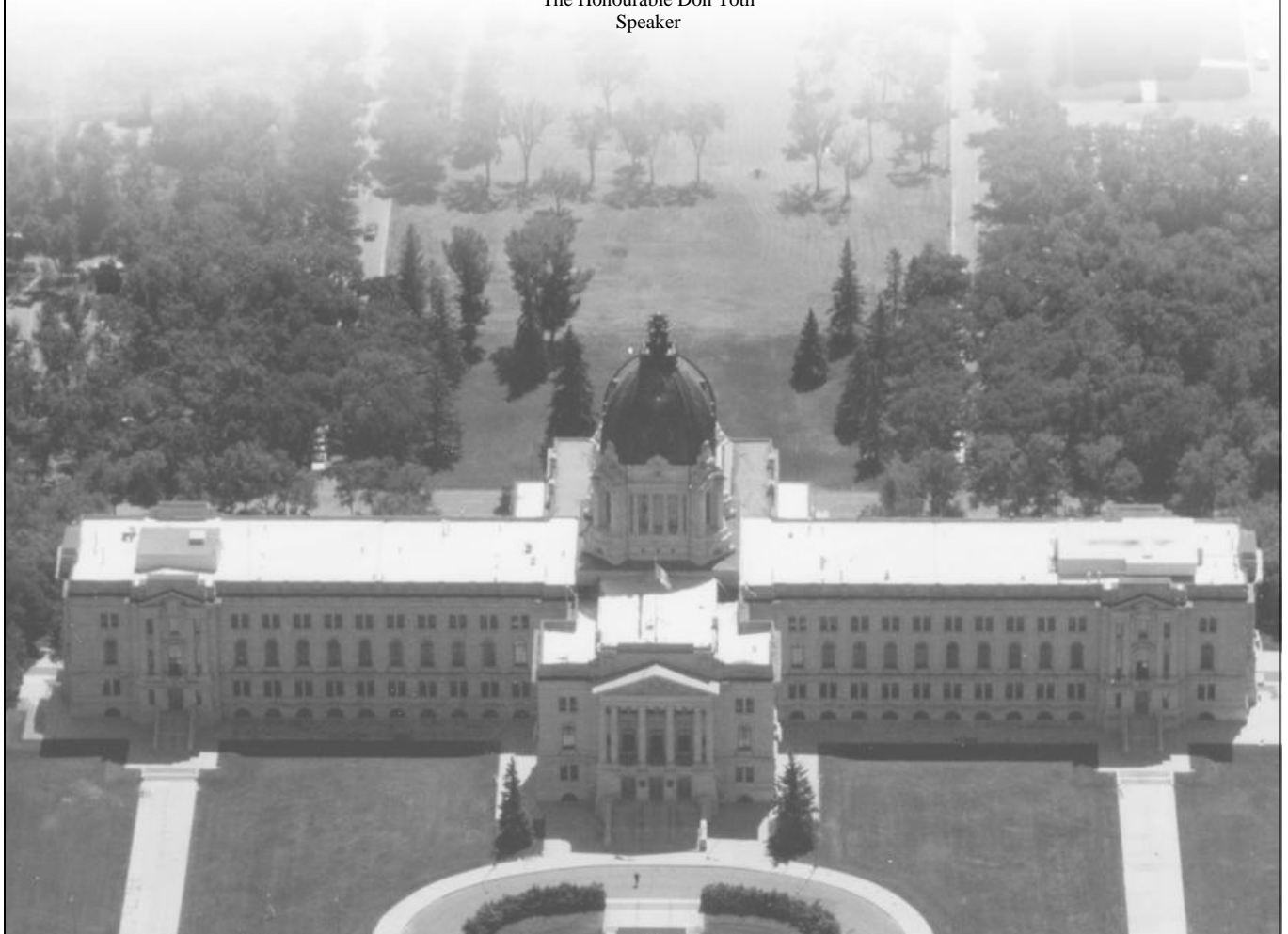
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

Name of Member	Political Affiliation	Constituency
Allchurch, Denis	SP	Rosthern-Shellbrook
Atkinson, Pat	NDP	Saskatoon Nutana
Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
Boyd, Hon. Bill	SP	Kindersley
Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
Brotten, Cam	NDP	Saskatoon Massey Place
Calvert, Lorne	NDP	Saskatoon Riversdale
Cheveldayoff, Hon. Ken	SP	Saskatoon Silver Springs
Chisholm, Michael	SP	Cut Knife-Turtleford
D'Autremont, Hon. Dan	SP	Cannington
Draude, Hon. June	SP	Kelvington-Wadena
Duncan, Dustin	SP	Weyburn-Big Muddy
Eagles, Doreen	SP	Estevan
Elhard, Hon. Wayne	SP	Cypress Hills
Forbes, David	NDP	Saskatoon Centre
Furber, Darcy	NDP	Prince Albert Northcote
Gantfoer, Hon. Rod	SP	Melfort
Harpauer, Hon. Donna	SP	Humboldt
Harper, Ron	NDP	Regina Northeast
Harrison, Jeremy	SP	Meadow Lake
Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
Heppner, Hon. Nancy	SP	Martensville
Hickie, Hon. Darryl	SP	Prince Albert Carlton
Higgins, Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Hutchinson, Hon. Bill	SP	Regina South
Huyghebaert, Yogi	SP	Wood River
Iwanchuk, Andy	NDP	Saskatoon Fairview
Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Krawetz, Hon. Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
LeClerc, Serge	SP	Saskatoon Northwest
McCall, Warren	NDP	Regina Elphinstone-Centre
McMillan, Tim	SP	Lloydminster
McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
Morin, Sandra	NDP	Regina Walsh Acres
Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Hon. Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottenbreit, Greg	SP	Yorkton
Quennell, Frank	NDP	Saskatoon Meewasin
Reiter, Jim	SP	Rosetown-Elrose
Ross, Laura	SP	Regina Qu'Appelle Valley
Schriemer, Joceline	SP	Saskatoon Sutherland
Stewart, Hon. Lyle	SP	Thunder Creek
Taylor, Len	NDP	The Battlefords
Tell, Hon. Christine	SP	Regina Wascana Plains
Toth, Hon. Don	SP	Moosomin
Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
Van Mulligen, Harry	NDP	Regina Douglas Park
Wall, Hon. Brad	SP	Swift Current
Weekes, Randy	SP	Biggar
Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
Wotherspoon, Trent	NDP	Regina Rosemont
Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney
Vacant		Cumberland

[The Assembly met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all members of the government, we want to offer a very general welcome to the many guests who have joined us today in the Assembly for what is about to transpire here in a few minutes and also, I'm sure, those who are also here to watch question period. Through you, Mr. Speaker, we want to welcome them to their Legislative Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with the Premier on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in welcoming all of those who are joining us in the gallery today to observe the budget, those who are joining us in other parts of this building. We welcome you here, and we know that together we form the great province of Saskatchewan. Welcome.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I will join with the Premier and the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to welcome our guests, but also just to take a moment to remind our guests of protocol in the Assembly. It is appropriate for guests not to participate in any of the debate. As well, if guests would also remain in their places until we have adjourned the Assembly, if that's at all possible. Just a little heads-up. Thank you very much.

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with a great deal of pride that I stand and present a petition that would work to provide improved health care service and delivery in the area of Moose Jaw. And the prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to take the necessary steps to provide funding for the expansion and renovation of the Moose Jaw Union Hospital.

As is in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I file these petitions on behalf of citizens of Moose Jaw, Regina, and Saskatoon. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Fairview.

Mr. Iwanchuk: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present several pages of petitions to the Legislative Assembly today on behalf of citizens of the province of Saskatchewan concerning the withdrawal of the proposed essential service legislation and the withdrawal of the proposed amendments to The Trade Union Act. The prayer reads as follows:

We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan urge the new government to withdraw both Bills and hold broad public consultations about labour relations in this province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

The petitions are signed by people from Saskatoon, Yorkton, and Prince Albert. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Rosemont.

Contributions of Community Association

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Mr. Speaker, it is my indeed honour to highlight the efforts and to thank the Regina Rosemont Mount Royal Community Association for their contributions within our community. Rosemont Mount Royal is a large community association serving approximately 3,800 households. It has a strong record of accountability, a proud history of volunteerism. The association has been responsible for coordinating community communications, sport, fitness, arts, craft, programs, seniors' groups, family socials, financial support to our schools, the purchasing of equipment and supplies, the outdoor rinks, and input into Regina civic affairs that directly involve our community.

It has been my privilege to witness this commitment, and I thank outgoing Chair, Elaine Dittmann, the 15-member executive, members, volunteers, participants past and present for their enriching contributions to our community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members opposite, the members of this Assembly to join with me in extending thanks to the Rosemont Mount Royal Community Association.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatchewan Rivers.

Focus on Women Trade Show

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I had the honour of volunteering my time at the 22nd annual Focus on Women trade show at the Prince Albert Exhibition Centre, where I was invited to take tickets and greet guests. It was my

pleasure to contribute to the success of such an important event. Women from all over our great province exhibited and attended this event.

This year there were over 66 booths at the trade show. I would like to recognize the directors, Joan Bibby and Linda Grimard, show administrators Katie Wilson and Tina Logodin, and committee member Rosie Cartier for all their exceptional work in organizing the event. It was through their hard work that the weekend ran smoothly and helped enhance the lives of women. This year there were over 66 booths at the trade show. Without their hard work and dedication of all the organizers, there's no way that such an event could be pulled off.

Along with International Women's Day and Rural Women's Month, this trade show serves as a reminder of all the valuable contributions that women make to our society. I hope that all members will join me in congratulating the organizers of the Focus on Women trade show on a job well done.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Prince Albert Northcote.

Seven-Year-Old Raises Money for Alzheimer's

Mr. Furber: — Mr. Speaker, Prince Albert is a community of people who reach out to help one another. One fine example of this selflessness and caring is a young Prince Albertan named Corbyn Morgan. Corbyn is seven years old, Mr. Speaker, and he raised over \$4,000 for the fifth annual Alzheimer Society Forget-Me-Not Walk held earlier this year. This is an enormous total when compared to the \$104,000 raised to date in the province in the entire history of the campaign. Mr. Speaker, the container of coins that he carried ended up being far too heavy for him to even carry.

As an aside, Mr. Speaker, Corbyn's contribution was also the highest amount raised by an individual.

Corbyn was very close to his grandfather, Gwyn Morgan, who is 72 years old and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in September '07. Corbyn was told about the walk through his school and the grade 1 student went to work. He sent emails, visited neighbours asking for pledges, worked countless hours, engaged the help of his family and of his community.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I ask all members to join with me in acknowledging the great contribution made by Corbyn Morgan and congratulating him in his tremendously successful campaign. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Martensville.

Dalmeny Students Support Schools in Afghanistan

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today to recognize students from my constituency. I would like to share with this Assembly the generosity of the grade 11 and 12 students from Dalmeny High School and area residents and

how they've helped some of the most vulnerable citizens of Afghanistan.

Sandra Schatz is a teacher at Dalmeny High School. Her sister-in-law Paulette is working for the United Nations in Kabul, Afghanistan. She told Sandra of an all-girls school in Afghanistan that was in need of help. These schools aim to educate girls, some of whom have never had the opportunity to attend school until the Taliban was overthrown. When Sandra heard this, she decided to get her students involved. Their interest turned into something amazing.

Mr. Speaker, many people do not realize this, but it is bitterly cold in many parts of Afghanistan. The students there are in desperate need of basic clothing and supplies. The grade 11 and 12 students at Dalmeny were on a mission. In just three weeks, these students raised over \$8,000 for winter clothes, school supplies, and wood for heating. So much was raised that they were able to help two schools. To top it off, the items were bought locally in Afghanistan to help to boost the local economy.

It is through efforts like this that the Afghan people will be able to finally rebuild their nation. Canada's federal Minister for International Development heard of their achievement and personally wrote them a letter to congratulate the students.

And today, on behalf of a very proud province, I would like to publicly congratulate grade 11 and 12 students of Dalmeny High School for their selflessness, generosity, and hard work.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Saskatoon Citizen Receives Global Citizens Award

Mr. Quennell: — The Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation was formed in 1974 by international development agencies active in Saskatchewan. It now encompasses the local committees of 35 churches, educational organizations, and agencies. The SCIC [Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation] is committed to the recognition of the dignity of all persons and their right to self-determination, protection of our fragile environment, and the promotion of global understanding, co-operation, peace, and justice.

Since 1991 the SCIC has annually given out Global Citizens Awards. Priscilla Settee is a 2008 recipient of the Global Citizens Award. Dr. Settee is an associate professor of native studies at the University of Saskatchewan. She works in the community of Saskatoon in a number of capacities including on the parents' council of Oskayak High School and as an adviser with the Iswewak group which focuses on disappeared and missing women.

Dr. Settee has initiated a number of projects linking the academy and the community, including a Canadian International Development Agency project with the University of San Marcos in Peru. She is a founding member of the Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute, established in 1999. The Global Citizens Award

recognizes Priscilla Settee's work at home and abroad.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Sutherland.

Saskatoon Student Awarded Carnegie Foundation Scholarship

Ms. Schriemer: — Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to bring to the attention of the Assembly the accomplishments of an outstanding young man in my constituency. Bahar Bahrani, a senior at Evan Hardy Collegiate, has been chosen as a Herbert H. Carnegie Future Aces Citizenship Award and Scholarship recipient.

Ninety-three schools from across Canada submitted applications to the Carnegie Foundation. Bahar is one of 20 finalists who will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to help with post-secondary tuition and expenses. He will be honoured at a reception in Toronto on April 11.

The Herbert Carnegie Foundation is a non-profit registered charitable organization whose mission it is to inspire and assist youth and adults to become the best they can be as a responsible, respectful, peaceful, and confident citizens of Canada.

Future Aces of the foundation offers 30 scholarships to students from across Canada who exhibit exemplary citizenship qualities and who are in need of financial assistance to further their education.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Assembly to join with me in congratulating Bahar Bahrani, an exceptional young man who has been singled out for his initiative and dedication in serving his school and community. The province is proud.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Status of the Artist Bill

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very disappointed when the status of the artist Bill was stalled from passing in 2007. I want to use Guy Vanderhaeghe as an illustration of my point. Mr. Vanderhaeghe grew up, studied, and now works in the province, actually in Saskatoon Eastview, while gaining world fame as a writer. His novel *The Englishman's Boy* was filmed in Saskatchewan, starring movie greats like Bob Hoskins and Nicholas Campbell.

Mr. Vanderhaeghe demonstrates a certain kind of Canadian nationalism with his own particular Saskatchewan flavour, recognizing our otherness in the world without branding other nations negatively. He has brought our province to life with the written word and has taken it to the world.

He believes his success has taken place in part because Saskatchewan people are recognizing and buying the work of

local artists, and including them in school curricula and library acquisition lists. We like what local artists are saying about us. They know who we are and what sets us apart from others in the world. And apparently the world likes what he has to say about us as well.

Mr. Vanderhaeghe has said, and I quote, "that we have a tradition of being progressive, both socially and politically," and have "a strong spirit of egalitarianism." He illustrated how truly he is Saskatchewan-made by stating that, although he takes the art of writing very seriously, he doesn't, quote, "see how that separates him from a carpenter or a mechanic, who also wants to do the best that they can."

Mr. Speaker, greats like Farley Mowat, Joni Mitchell, Maria Campbell, and many others have taken Saskatchewan to the world. They deserve the best we can give them in return. We need to protect them as well as we protect other workers. This is what the status of the artist Bill was intended to do.

Our failure to pass this Bill lets down our current artists as well as our future artists. We need to revisit and pass the status of the artist Bill. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[13:45]

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Increased Fees

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party government is about to announce their first budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Yates: — And we expect it will be a surplus budget, thanks largely to 16 years of hard work by the NDP [New Democratic Party]. The provincial treasury is bursting at the seams, having inherited \$1.5 billion and a booming economy from the previous government.

But what does the new government do? They pick our pockets with a variety of increased fees only days before the budget. These fee increases will average between 30 and 60 per cent. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, the fee increases will cost Saskatchewan taxpayers about \$650,000 annually. This is nothing but a slap in the face to Saskatchewan taxpayers.

To the Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing whose ministry proposed the majority of fee increases, considering the fact that the government is sitting on \$1 billion surplus, how can the government justify taking \$650,000 out of the pockets of Saskatchewan taxpayers on an annual basis for these increased fees?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for

Corrections and Public Safety.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I thank the member opposite for that question because when I became the minister in November, my officials had informed me that some of those fees hadn't been looked at since 1988, Mr. Speaker, especially the ones involving amusement rides. Some other ones, Mr. Speaker, actually created a backlog.

So for the public safety concern we have for the safety and security of our citizens, we couldn't even get enough people hired to do the inspections because Alberta had a boom, Mr. Speaker, and the inspectors that we require went there to do the job, Mr. Speaker. So now for us to have them come back, Mr. Speaker, you have to understand that they could ask more money, an increase in wages.

So after consulting with the industry, my ministry officials had told me that these particular fees had not increased, and they were expecting it, Mr. Speaker. So from now on, the fee increase was talked about within the ministry for this budget, as a cost recovery, Mr. Speaker — to cover the costs of the new inspectors. That's all it is, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, thanks to the people of Saskatchewan and the previous government, there is no doubt that Saskatchewan is booming. Everywhere you look you can see new construction. The enormous growth in construction and development has placed Saskatchewan tradespeople in high demand. Saskatchewan needs even more tradespeople.

A quick look at the list of fees that are increasing shows that the bulk of increased fees will affect tradespeople and the businesses they work for, Mr. Speaker. There are going to be increases to power engineers' certificate and examination fees. There are going to be increases to pressure welders' licence and testing fees and increases to pressure vessel and boiler installation fees, to name just a few.

To the Minister of Corrections and Public Safety and Policing: why in a time when tradespeople are in such great demand would the government choose to punish them with an increase to so many of the fees that directly affect them and the businesses that they do their services for?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Corrections and Public Safety.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the question I should pose to the member opposite: why would they raise a wiener roast tax and charge those and use our tourism facilities like they proposed last year, Mr. Speaker? Why would

those members opposite, Mr. Speaker, not increase a surcharge to victims on the actual tickets that are issued by my police forces, Mr. Speaker? Those monies go to people who need it the most.

But I'll take the time to answer this question because you know what, Mr. Speaker, the reason that the fees are increasing is simply because we have to meet the demand of the inspectors' salaries, Mr. Speaker. The tradespeople understand that they're going to have to pay more if they go to Alberta, Manitoba, BC [British Columbia]. We are still under those fees, Mr. Speaker. So we're doing a due diligence on that file to make sure our tradespeople still have a good fee structure in this province. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, since the Sask Party has taken over government, we have seen political staff, political appointees, and party faithful hired by the new government receive huge wage increases over those employed in these very same positions by the previous government. The increases given to less than one dozen of those individuals would have offset these fee increases.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party government expects tradespeople and businesses to pay more through increased fees such as pressure vessel and boiler survey and registration fees, and pressure vessel and boiler installation and licence fees. Mr. Speaker, they pay their friends more and expect businesses and tradespeople to pay the bill.

To the Minister of Corrections and Public Safety and Policing: will you cancel these fee increases and support the people and businesses of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Corrections and Public Safety.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Mr. Speaker, no I will not. And I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker. Because the people who have the safety and security of the citizens of this province paramount are those same people who own those buildings, own those pressure vessels, own the amusement rides, Mr. Speaker, and they are prepared to pay that difference for the safety of our citizens. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Housing Crisis

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a lack of affordable housing and quality housing is at a

boiling point in Saskatchewan today. We know of young people couch surfing up in La Loche because they can't find a place to stay. We know students are holding demonstrations to draw attention to the lack of affordable housing. We know that seniors are worried about whether or not they can afford their rent. And this morning, we heard media reports of families having to stay in the emergency room at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon last week.

To the Minister of Social Services: does she believe, does she truly believe there's an affordable housing crisis here in Saskatchewan today?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you very much for that question. And the quick answer quite frankly is, yes I do believe there is an affordable housing crisis in the province today, as well as an available housing crisis.

And that is why I have asked two very credible gentlemen to take a look at this issue. The government previous had done some programs. We've been monitoring those programs, and I might add, Mr. Speaker, they put them in place on the eve of the election. And we've been . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I would ask members to allow the Minister of Social Services to respond to the question.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'd like to say that they took a look at it on the eve of an election. That was after the students were saying that there was a crisis when they went to get housing in the fall, and that was after we heard from different vulnerable citizens within the province. They finally took a look at it and put programs in place on the eve of the election.

In less than six months, our government's going to look at strengthening those programs as well as addressing the industry and what they can do to help this crisis.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, of course HomeFirst was announced in 2004, and we were right on the ball. And of course we were listening to people last summer.

But I want to say this. Yesterday the minister announced a new task force to study the issue and one of the members appointed to this task force is a former MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly], Ted Merriman. Well last summer Mr. Merriman called the housing market an emergency situation. At the time he said to government, quote, "You just can't wait. You're not the one living on the streets." Well the housing situation has indeed worsened since those comments were made but the

government now seems all too willing to just sit and wait for a report. But like Mr. Merriman said, they're not the ones sitting on the streets, living on the streets.

To the Minister of Social Services: why is she waiting to act on what is clearly a pressing need for Saskatchewan families, seniors, and students? How can she look at her former colleague in the eye and tell him this is action, when clearly all it is, is waiting?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Mr. Speaker, it's quite surprising to me that that member would even stand on his feet today and come up with such a silly question. People have been waiting for 16 years for a government that never, ever conceived that this province could grow. They never planned for growth. They never did anything about the housing situation till the eve of an election. Then they finally put some programs into place.

And they can't take a compliment. I have said, Mr. Speaker, those programs were good. We need to strengthen them. We also need to see what the industry and what municipal governments need to partner with us to not only address affordability but availability, Mr. Speaker. And that's what these two gentlemen are going to do.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well in February of last year our premier put an additional \$100 million into affordable housing and community revitalization, the single largest expansion for the HomeFirst program. In this past summer, our government heard the voices of those who said more needed to be done. Countless groups were consulted and provided input into the solutions they felt would improve the housing crisis.

Why is the minister insisting on reinventing the wheel? Is the photo op really worth the continued suffering of Saskatchewan people? My question is to the Minister of Social Services: will the minister stop playing politics with people's lives and get to work on the affordable housing starting today, especially with today's budget?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Before I recognize the minister, I just want to remind members to address their comments through the Chair. Minister of Social Services.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know there's fewer members on the opposite side of the

House, and maybe they need to get a few more researchers because the fact is yes, they did say, they announced money for housing. They said it was there. They never spent it. They never spent it. It was a hollow announcement.

So we currently have 856 units that are in construction right now and will be ready, which represents 71.5 million of those dollars. There also is an expression of interest that is going out fairly shortly which is a total of 18.4 million for First Nations housing off reserve and Métis housing. We have 84 submissions of additional groups that want to partner with Sask Housing Corporation in different projects. That is all happening as we speak. It did not happen when that member was government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Labour Relations Board

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, we finally got a straight answer from the Minister of Labour who bowed to political pressure and promised to hold a public competition through the Public Service Commission for the new Vice-Chair of the Labour Relations Board.

Now one way to get a straight answer from the minister is to ask a very simple question. Two weeks ago the government fired the Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Labour Relations Board and bypassed any open and public competition in the appointment of their new Chair, Ken Love, who has very close links to the Sask Party, and they promptly gave Mr. Love a \$60,000 per year raise.

My question: if an open and competitive process is good enough for the new Chair, why not the Chair?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, as we've discussed in this House, when we speak about the new Chair of the LRB [Labour Relations Board] we speak about an individual who's capable, competent, respected throughout the legal community and the broader community in Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, we have every confidence that he will set a new course for the LRB, making new efficiencies and running it professionally on behalf of the people of this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, as the public knows, J. Seibel, the former Chair of the Labour Relations Board was a private practice lawyer working with Gauley and Company in

Saskatoon. He acted, before his appointment as Vice-Chair, as a lawyer for employers and employees who had issues with their union.

He went through a competitive public process through the Public Service Commission to become the Vice-Chair of the Labour Relations Board, and then he moved up to the Labour Relations Board position of Chair.

To the minister, can he name a single thing, any action, any decision, any discussion, any problem, anything at all that the former Chair of the Labour Relations Board did wrong, and why was this Chair, J. Seibel, a well-known Labour Relations Board lawyer who has represented employers, why did you fire him?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:00]

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is experiencing a time of renewal. Obviously what we see . . . people returning back to the province, coming to the province for the first time, 13,300 new full-time jobs, Mr. Speaker. You can get a sense of renewal in the air, Mr. Speaker, and renewal is what our government is about, Mr. Speaker.

What we have said is that across various agency, boards, and commission, there will be a sense of renewal, Mr. Speaker. And this decision was in keeping with that spirit, sir.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Well, Mr. Speaker, with Mr. Love's appointment to the Labour Relations Board, the public is getting a sense of the Sask Party renewal in the public service.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there have been many quotes about the minister's inability to answer questions. From the CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] on March 7, there were still no answers as to how much this will cost taxpayers. *Globe and Mail* March 8, Mr. Norris, and I quote, ". . . didn't answer questions about why he felt the three [LRB members] were not qualified to continue in their posts." *The StarPhoenix* March 13, the minister ". . . refused to answer in question period and to reporters . . ." And in the *Leader-Post* yesterday, ". . . getting clear, reasonable explanations has been like extracting teeth," Mr. Speaker.

Even the Premier finally admitted on Monday that maybe the minister hadn't done a very good job of communicating. Now here's his chance. Here is his chance. Can he finally tell the people why he fired the former Chair and the two Vice-Chairs and how much is it going to cost the taxpayers? Will it cost as much as the 650,000 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for Employment and Labour.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate how attentive the member opposite is to the research that comes out of the media, and I hope that maybe she'll explore some broader venues when she goes to do her research next time.

Mr. Speaker, in essence what we're looking at, Mr. Speaker, is a sense of renewal across Saskatchewan. That sense of renewal is affecting agencies, boards, and commissions under this government as it has under previous governments, Mr. Speaker. What I've said on the cost, Mr. Speaker, is we will see because obviously there are some elements that are still under negotiation, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan, not unlike every other provincial jurisdiction in our country, has dozens of administrative tribunals and quasi-judicial bodies like the Human Rights Tribunal, the Legal Aid Commission, the Saskatchewan Securities Commission. And the way the government has handled the Labour Relations Board really bodes very poorly for the way the government plans on running our province.

Let's review. They fired the Chair and the two Vice-Chairs. They still haven't explained why. They've bypassed any normal hiring practices in hiring a Chair with obvious connections to the Sask Party and given their friend a \$60,000 raise. And what's worse, the Deputy Premier and the Premier have indicated that they expect the Labour Relations Board appointees to take into account their ideological predisposition. This is absolutely improper and downright frightening. Members of quasi-judicial boards should have not have to worry about what . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I ask the member to place her question, please.

Ms. Atkinson: — Members of quasi-judicial boards shouldn't have to worry about their rulings, and I would ask this: how does the member opposite justify this type of political interference in an administrative tribunal and a quasi-judicial board?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the deputy leader.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you,

Mr. Speaker. You know I've listened to that member for the last number of minutes talking about transition, and talking about records, and talking about the process that has been followed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share for the people in Saskatchewan today what that government did in 1991-92. In 1991, Mr. Speaker, the headline in the *Leader-Post* on October 23 said, "Transition begins." And there's a quote from the Premier Roy Romanow that says if you're not politically compatible, you are not competent. Then there was the headline that said SEDCO and STC presidents dismissed. Mr. Speaker, it says . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. The longer members take up time, the shorter the question period will be. Allow the minister to respond.

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Mr. Speaker, from the *Leader-Post* — this very confidential document — Tuesday December 3, 1991, "SGI President [Alex Wilde is] dismissed." Mr. Speaker, on Saturday December 7, 1991, the headline reads, "Six more . . . jobs axed by NDP." Mr. Speaker, the headline on December 10, '91, says, "Minister maintains dismissals not politically motivated." Mr. Speaker, another headline, health official dismissed. There's dozens and dozens of headlines that I hope to get on the record today, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Nutana.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the three members of the Labour Relations Board that were fired went through a public competition through the Public Service Commission to receive their jobs. They were not politically appointed. Mr. Speaker, there is a person who's been appointed to the Human Rights Commission who went through a competitive process. Mr. Speaker, the Ombudsman has called for a competitive process for all public tribunals or quasi-judicial tribunals, people who administer justice in the province who are not in the court system. Mr. Speaker, he has called for that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's a very simple question: can we expect further firings of people who've gone through a competitive selection process to receive their appointment to quasi-judicial bodies? Can we expect the person from the Human Rights Commission to be fired? And other people who have gone through this competitive process, are they going to put their political stamp on all of these tribunals?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the deputy leader.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to share a few more headlines with the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, on January 4, 1992, Mr. Speaker — and I want people to pay close attention to this — the headline reads, single mother took transfer then given the axe, on January 4, 1992. Mr. Speaker, in January 1992 the heading is, more civil servants lose jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read this paragraph from a headline on January 16, 1992. It says, NDP fires PSC [Public Service Commission] chairman. The NDP government has dismissed the head of the Public Service Commission and released the names of several other employees it has dismissed.

Mr. Speaker, the headings continue. Three fired from Crowns. Former cabinet aide fired. Government dismisses six. Melville mayor fired. Mr. Speaker, there are dozens of people that were fired by that former government.

The Speaker: — Member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's . . . Order. Order. I recognize the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Budget Expectations

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today this government will deliver a budget built on the largest surplus that's ever been inherited by an incoming government in the province of Saskatchewan. They will build a budget on what is the strongest economy that this province has ever known.

And yet today, Mr. Speaker, we have students in this province, we have seniors, we have low-income families, we have families in the North, on First Nations, and in our inner cities who are very concerned about the availability and affordability of housing. We have today, Mr. Speaker, in this province, families and students who are awaiting a place in a training seat so that they might become part . . .

The Speaker: — Order. A number of government members have been trying to participate in the debate. I would ask the members to give the Leader of the Opposition the opportunity to place his question. Leader of the Opposition, would you place your question please.

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And we have families in this province who are awaiting real relief, real relief on their property taxes.

So, Mr. Speaker, today this government is sitting on a mountain of money. My question is to the Premier: will these Saskatchewan families and these Saskatchewan students feel a real difference in their lives tomorrow morning as a result of the budget this afternoon?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — The good news, the good news, Mr. Speaker, is that the answer to that question, very directly, is yes.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Saskatchewan people are, in just a few moments, going to hear about perhaps the most exciting budget in modern history in Saskatchewan, an historic budget, Mr. Speaker, that seeks to do a couple of things.

The Leader of the Opposition is correct. High commodity prices have set about an economic momentum in the province that we welcome. People are coming home to Saskatchewan. The numbers have even gotten better since the election, frankly, and they were moving in the right direction after the election. It's true.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Now, Mr. Speaker, it's up to all of us in this House then to undertake those measures that will keep this momentum going, that will ensure that Saskatchewan is ready for growth, that will deal with a massive infrastructure deficit left behind by those members opposite when they were the government. Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. No one ought to doubt the resolve of this government to fix that infrastructure deficit left behind by those opposite.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Final question. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Calvert: — Sit down. Mr. Speaker, invite the cheering section to sit down for a minute. We want one more question.

You know, Mr. Speaker, some of us recall a former minister of Finance who had claims about his budget too. I think his name was Bob Andrew. And I wonder where he is today.

Mr. Speaker, the very first thing that this Premier said after he was appointed Premier, the very first thing he said publicly was to declare that the finances of the province of Saskatchewan were, quote, "stark." And then in response to that tragic news, what did he do? Well his government went ahead and they raised — doubled in some cases — the political staff salaries in their ministers' offices. The chief of staff salaries almost doubled. So today, Mr. Speaker, those salaries are more than the private members on the government side are getting paid.

And since then, Mr. Speaker, what have we seen? Well we've seen a new Labour Relations Board Chair appointed. And what happens there? He gets a \$60,000 raise, a 50 per cent raise. That's in the case of stark finances.

And so my question to the Premier is this. My question to the Premier is this. You're sitting on a mountain of money. You've got oil at over \$100 a barrel. You've got a stronger economy than ever before. As a result of your budget today, can Saskatchewan families expect the same kind of improvement in their lives as a result of this budget as you're giving to your political staff and your politically appointed appointments?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well if I may, just if I may begin with a bit of truth and reconciliation of some of the purported facts that have been offered by the hon. member from Riversdale, let me just say, in his earlier question, he talked about property tax relief. We're going to hear in a few moments about what is in the budget in terms of property tax relief.

But I'll tell you what. This party now sitting on the government side of the House, when we make a commitment on property tax in an election campaign, it is our intent — and more on that in a moment — to keep that promise, unlike that member opposite, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — When it comes to, when it comes to the political costs of this new government, let me tell you — and I'm not sure why the former premier wants to go here, but fine — we have made it a commitment that the political staff costs of this government will be lower than what we got from the NDP government. And by the way, Mr. Speaker, we already know that that promise has already been kept.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — There's about, there's about 17 other promises that have been kept, from fixed election dates to cutting the NDP used car tax. And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, the most important promise of all from our government is that we want to sustain the growth. We want to be ready for growth. We want to fix the infrastructure deficit left behind by the previous administration. Just wait for a few minutes more on that count, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Question period has elapsed. I call the members to order.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the government to table answers to questions 294 to 379.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Questions 294 to 379 have been tabled.

[14:15]

TABLING OF ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — I've got a motion first. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to submit the estimates accompanied by a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: — I would ask everyone to rise for the message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor. The message is as follows:

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the 12 months ending March 31, 2009, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly. Honourable Gordon L. Barnhart, Lieutenant Governor, province of Saskatchewan.

Please be seated. I recognize the Minister of Finance.

MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY (BUDGET DEBATE)

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to take this opportunity to make some very special introductions. I would like to introduce some of the members of my family that are able to be here today with us, and first of all I'd like to introduce my daughter Pattie; my sister-in-law and her daughter Allison— Louise Gantefoer and Allison Gantefoer. I'd like to introduce my sister Jane and her daughter Janet. And most importantly, I'd like to introduce Carole.

You know, Carole and I met in 1966, as hard as it is to imagine. We were married. We've been married for 39 years and in that time we've had three wonderful daughters and son-in-laws, Laurie and Mike in Calgary with their children — Hayley, Scott, and Rachael; Pattie who I've introduced, and her husband Tim in Melfort, and our grandchildren, Grant and Jack. And Bonnie, who is unable to be here today, and her husband Sam, from Regina, with their children Caleb and Sophie. And if you've kept count, that adds up to seven wonderful and delightful grandchildren.

We as a family have shared much over these years and today we share the pride that I have in being asked to serve this great province. Welcome to you and thank you for being here.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — It is my honour today as Minister of Finance to deliver this year's budget — the first ever budget handed down by our new government in Saskatchewan.

Last fall's election came at a pivotal time in our province's history. Saskatchewan was already enjoying a period of significant growth. Our economy was growing. New jobs were being created. And for the first time in many years, more people were moving into the province than were moving out.

So the fundamental question of the campaign became, who is best able to sustain this growth and ensure it turns into lasting prosperity for all Saskatchewan people? All the parties put forward their best ideas to answer this very fundamental question. And on November 7, Saskatchewan people made a historic choice. They chose the first ever Saskatchewan Party government, based on our new ideas and the commitments we

made to sustain the economic momentum.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — For this honour and this great opportunity, we are both humbled by and grateful to the faith shown by the people of Saskatchewan in our Premier and in his government. But we are very mindful that along with this great opportunity, Saskatchewan people have also handed us some pretty clear expectations. They expect us to do what we said we would do. They expect us to keep our promises and to sustain the economic momentum. As my colleagues and I worked to prepare our first budget, these were our guiding principles.

In fact, today I've chosen to wear a pair of special shoes as I deliver this first budget. Not just any shoes — they were the ones I wore as I campaigned last fall, as I went door to door talking to voters about our campaign commitments. And I wear them today to remind myself of these promises, and more importantly to remind myself it's time to keep them.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Today in Saskatchewan there's a contagious optimism sweeping our province. After years of waiting, Saskatchewan people now sense that this is our time. Essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, and I quote, "A creative economy is the fuel of magnificence."

Saskatchewan is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Our resource-rich yet diverse economy is red-hot. We are the envy of the nation with opportunities others can only dream about. We have stepped away from the economic shadow cast by our neighbour to the west. Saskatchewan quite simply has come of age.

And we're no longer a have-not province. In fact in many areas, we're leading the nation. Retail sales growth, number one in Canada. Growth in international exports, number one in Canada. Growth in the value of building permits, number one in Canada. Housing starts are number one in Canada as more and more young families build new homes and make a clear and confident statement: our future is in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — We are currently experiencing the largest population growth in 30 years. Our population is rising as young families move back. Friends share with me and as a father and a grandfather I'm only too happy about the stories of sons, daughters, and grandchildren who are returning to this province.

You know it used to be that when I drove through Melfort and saw the Alberta plates on the cars in the driveways, I knew that most were there for a very brief visit and soon would be packing up and heading back home to Alberta. Today I know that many of these Alberta plates will soon be coming off, and Saskatchewan plates will be taking their place.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — And that means a whole lot more than

just trading in their car insurance. It means they're also trading in and trading up for a future in Saskatchewan.

Outside experts predict Saskatchewan will jump to the top of the economic growth in 2000 again. Again number one in Canada. More people are working in Saskatchewan than ever before. Our skilled labour force is hard pressed to keep up with the pace of demands for other workers. Simply put, Saskatchewan is on a roll.

The task of our government and of this budget is to sustain the economic momentum to ensure that all Saskatchewan people enjoy the benefits of a growing economy, and to ensure that we meet the challenges and avoid the pitfalls of the rapid growth we have seen in other jurisdictions. Which brings us to where we are today.

If we are to turn the current economic surge into an enduring period of sustained prosperity for our province, we must be ready for growth. In other places we've seen the problems and the pressures that can arise when an aging infrastructure fails to keep up the pace of growth. Those same pressures are now emerging in Saskatchewan. Simply put, while Saskatchewan is ready for growth, our infrastructure is not.

Our schools are in need of upgrades and renewal to ensure educators have proper facilities to teach the future generations of this province. Our schools and health care facilities are now overstressed environments and at times no longer a place to find wellness. Our roads and highways are crumbling under the weight of heavy traffic from heavier loads.

Saskatchewan is ready for growth, but our infrastructure is not. We must address the infrastructure shortfall that we have inherited. We simply must build up our schools, our hospitals, our roads, and our highways. We must make them ready, for they have important jobs to do. We must prepare for growth and we must make a significant investment in the future.

The time for that investment is now. Today I am pleased to announce a ready-for-growth initiative — the largest capital investment in the history of Saskatchewan. Our government will invest \$1 billion in infrastructure across Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — One billion dollars to build and repair our hospitals, our highways, and our schools to ensure that Saskatchewan is ready for growth. Nearly \$200 million will pay for key repairs and upgrades to our hospitals and health facilities, and will help to purchase new medical and safety equipment. We will enhance these centres of healing and take pride in their condition. For instance we'll fix the leaking roofs at the health centres in Leader and Climax. And we must give hospitals in this province the capacity to keep up with health care demands. Capital dollars include plans to expand the Moose Jaw hospital and to also plan for a maternal child hospital within the Royal University Hospital.

Over \$160 million will focus on important upgrades and repairs to schools in rural and urban communities and make improvements to our universities and training centres. This money will give the green light to 11 new school projects across

Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Over \$400 million will help strengthen the crumbling roads and highways so that they can better carry the loads that go along with economic growth. This money will be used to help to reinforce roads so they are the lifelines connecting our communities, big and small. These dollars will support continued progress in northern First Nations access roads, to lessen the isolation they feel and ensure that they are fully ready to participate in a growing economy.

This major investment will see the completion of twinning projects on major corridors, including Highways No. 1 and 16 and continuing progress on Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

Nearly \$140 million will flow towards municipalities, including the building communities fund. Significant money will improve the correctional centre in Regina, modernize our emergency communication system, and will also be used to maintain government buildings and replace equipment.

We're also dedicating more funds to the forest fire fleet and to regional and provincial parks to protect and enhance the natural beauty of this great province.

We will be ready to embrace the opportunities coming to us. Today we can afford these upgrades thanks to our thriving economy. We can't afford to ignore the infrastructure flaws, hoping that things are going to get better on their own. We can't afford to let the pressures of growth outpace our infrastructure's ability to handle growth.

These improvements are big steps on the path to sustaining our economy. The time for this investment is now and we can make these improvements because of the strength in the economy and our strong fiscal position. This initiative, this \$1 billion capital investment in our schools, our highways, our hospitals, and our future will ensure that Saskatchewan is ready for growth.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government came to power with an ambitious agenda. We were serious about the work ahead of us, and we will keep our promises to the people of Saskatchewan. I'm proud to say our government has already achieved significant progress.

We have fixed election dates every four years, a smaller cabinet, stronger balanced budget legislation. We have kept these promises. We promised to remove the unpopular provincial sales tax on used cars, to provide cancer patients with access to drugs that will prolong their lives, and to make our streets and highways safer through stiffer penalties for drunk drivers. We have kept these promises.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you. We promised to introduce changes to ensure greater democracy in the workplace and to protect essential services. We have kept these promises.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised to assemble a unique, forward-looking group of leaders to form Enterprise Saskatchewan, and we promised to invite First Nations leaders to round table discussions on the duty to consult. We have kept these promises.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Today's budget contains a fulfillment of funding of over 40 more commitments to benefit the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Today's budget will benefit the hungry and provide care for the vulnerable adults and children in our society — the very poor, the very sick, the addicted, and people who can no longer care for themselves or their families. Today's budget will support active and healthy families in Saskatchewan, and encourage safe and vibrant communities.

Today's budget will strengthen health care and fund an effective education system. Today's budget will benefit the people of Saskatchewan in a time of great economic momentum and prosperity. These are the commitments we made during last fall election campaign. Today's budget will fulfill these commitments.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government has big dreams and big plans for the children of this province. We want Saskatchewan children to be happy and well cared for. We want them to be healthy, and we want them to be active. Today's budget will benefit Saskatchewan children and families.

We promised to increase funding to school lunch and hunger programs, so our children can fill their minds with knowledge and not be distracted by empty stomachs. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:30]

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised an improved prescription drug plan providing a \$15 cap on drugs for children aged 14 and under. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We want families to enjoy the beautiful vacation spots Saskatchewan has to offer. That's why we promised to eliminate the unpopular campfire permit fee and to increase funding Saskatchewan regional and provincial parks, to upgrade facilities, and create more electrified campsites. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised to make

Saskatchewan's children activities more affordable for our families. Today we are keeping that promise by announcing the new active families benefit which will come into effect for the 2009 tax year.

Our government believes in a province where everyone is able to achieve their full potential, and we recognize the tremendous work done by community-based organizations to achieve this goal. And that's why we promised to provide an additional \$5 million a year to CBOs [community-based organization] that provide life skills and employment training. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government believes that a vibrant arts community is key to providing a high quality of life that attracts people to our province. And that's why we promised to maintain funding for provincial arts organizations. And today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — A wonderful, popular saying among First Nations and indigenous communities around the world, which resonates with me as well, says treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children. That's why we promised a significant boost of \$10 million to green initiatives funding, so we can keep our environment healthy and balanced and that so Saskatchewan will remain a beautiful and clean place to live. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government committed to doubling the caregiver tax credit to assist family caregivers who generously give of their time and compassion to help elderly, sick, or disabled family members. Today I am pleased to announce that we are not only keeping that promise; we will go further. We will also be increasing other tax credits that assist families in caring for their family members with disabilities. So we are keeping that promise as well today and enhancing it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised relief for the significant burden of property taxes in this province by increasing the educational property tax rebate from 10 to 12 per cent this year from homeowners and from 38 to 47 per cent for farmers. Today we are keeping that promise and increasing this tax credit to nearly \$160 million of tax relief.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — This translates to an average farm landowner saving over \$2,000 in taxes on their property, and we recognize that more work needs to be done to form long-term solutions to put this issue at rest.

Today's budget will benefit Saskatchewan as we work together to make our communities safe and vibrant. We promised to

assist those in our society that need our help. We promised to commit major new funding to additional addiction treatment. Today we are keeping that promise. We promised over \$1 million to support transition houses and sexual assault centres. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We also promised to make our communities safer by putting more police officers on the street. Today we're keeping that promise. This budget provides an additional \$3 million required to hire 30 more police officers who will be posted across the province. This is the first step in our four-year commitment to expand the police force by 120 new members. And we promised to increase the victim surcharge paid by offenders to provide additional support to the victims of crime. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Philosopher Henri Frederic Amiel said, "In health there is freedom. Health is the first of all liberties." Today's budget will give a much needed boost to health care in Saskatchewan. Our first step was to increase the Ministry of Health's budget by over \$300 million to over \$3.7 billion.

Health care professionals can expect the support they need in this year's budget. We've recently announced that \$60 million will flow towards a new Saskatchewan Union of Nurses partnership to begin to address the nursing shortage in our province. We've also promised significant new dollars to support the additional training seats for physicians and nurses. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We will encourage physician recruitment and retention for internationally trained medical graduates. We promised new funding to add more drugs to the prescription drug plan. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government will provide \$6 million to make new and more effective prescription drugs available to Saskatchewan people. We promised to increase support for cancer patients, to increase funding to the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, and to cover the cost of Avastin and other much-needed cancer drugs and supplies. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised proactive measures to promote health and wellness in this province, and we promised to establish a 10-year capital plan for health care to keep our system in good shape for the future, to ensure our hospitals and health facilities are repaired and maintained to better meet the needs of the sick and the injured. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Today's budget will benefit students in Saskatchewan. We are dedicating 75 million additional dollars to our university and post-education system to train, retain, and attract young people to Saskatchewan. This is the key to the prosperity of our province. We promised a bold, new initiative to keep more of our educated young people in Saskatchewan by offering \$20,000 in tuition rebates over seven years following graduation. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you. The budget speech is hot work.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised to help university students with their tuition costs, and we are providing another year of tuition freeze with an 8 per cent increase in operating costs dedicated to universities. Today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I reminded guests and ask them not to participate in debate. Thank you. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised to increase support to the Johnson-Shoyama School of Public Policy to train brilliant minds for brilliant futures in the civil service right here in Saskatchewan. Today we are keeping that promise. We promised to address the labour shortage by increasing training opportunities throughout the province. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — This budget supports the creation of 300 more training opportunities for on-reserve adult basic education seats through local college and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We'll also be working to develop further training opportunities through the \$15 million dedicated to enhance training opportunities for under-skilled individuals in a new 6-year labour market agreement recently signed with the federal government. In addition to a significant capital investment, Saskatchewan schools, under a ready-for-growth initiative, we have promised to increase operating funding from K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12]. Today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We promised to maintain funding levels for child care and early childhood learning and development programs in Saskatchewan. Today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — In fact this budget will add 500 more child care spaces, giving our respected child care workers a raise and including 38 new pre-kindergarten programs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — We feel it's vital to nourish child care and early childhood learning and development so that our smallest citizens can learn about the wonders of education at a time when they are most receptive.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Saskatchewan people will benefit from our thriving economy. We want to see everyone enjoy the benefits of opportunity and prosperity as we prepare for growth. We promised to fully fund our agricultural risk management programs, crop insurance and agri-stability and agri-invest programs formerly known as CAIS [Canadian agricultural income stabilization]. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Our government is committing over \$220 million to fully fund these programs which includes a \$25 million increase to the crop insurance program. We will also keep our promise to initiate a crop insurance review this year to provide better coverage for our producers.

We promised to provide additional funding for the petroleum institute technology research centre, and we've also expanded the potential of CO₂ capture. Today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — And we promised to introduce five-year interest free loans to municipalities in our Saskatchewan infrastructure growth initiative to assist communities in dealing with a growing demand for both commercial and residential lots. Today we're keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — As our economy grows, affordable homes are more difficult to find, especially for first-time homebuyers and renters. Our government is reviewing this issue and will take necessary steps to ensure that we all benefit from our province's prosperity. We promise to dedicate the proceeds from the sale of the NewGrade upgrader to fixing our roads and highways. Today we're not only keeping that promise; we're accelerating our timetable by committing \$140 million over the next two years to municipal roads and highways.

We will develop plans this year in partnership with the Saskatchewan universities for a transportation centre of excellence. The centre's purpose is to do research and test new technologies on road construction and repair to provide innovation that will improve our highway system.

We promised to increase municipal revenue sharing at 7 per cent for the year 2008-09. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — We promised to double tourism funding in this province to \$16 million to spread the word of what a wonderful place Saskatchewan is to explore. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — We promised to reinstate the Saskatchewan mineral exploration tax credit to encourage all Saskatchewan residents to participate in our economic success. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — We promised to increase grants for First Nations consultations, including support for the mapping of traditional territories. Today we are keeping that promise.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Today's budget also recognizes that full participation in the economy by First Nations and Métis people is vital to sustaining our economic momentum. That's why we will boost loans to the Northern Development Fund to assist with business development and diversification and create more jobs in northern Saskatchewan. Our government wants to expand on programs promoting self-reliance in communities and employment and business development. We will continue to make grants available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs to create more businesses with the spinoff effect of more jobs to our First Nations people. We will also enhance partnerships and open lines of communications between employers, training centres, and Aboriginal people.

Our government believes in the incredible talents, creativity, and skills of our First Nations residents. We believe in what they can achieve, and we will offer them the tools they need to get there.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Our government believes that the foundation of a growing economy and long-term prosperity for our province is sound fiscal management, balancing the budget, and paying down debt. That's why we promised our first budget would include \$250 million for debt reduction in order to lessen the burden on future generations. Today we are keeping that promise. And we promised to balance the budget. I'm very pleased to announce today that we are keeping that promise. This budget is balanced.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:45]

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — French author, Anatole France who's believed to have said:

To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but we must also dream; not only [to] plan, but also to believe.

Today's budget provides not only a vision, but also a plan for securing Saskatchewan's future. It's about our dreams for the future. It's about action, the action that we must take to be ready for this growth.

Our government's plan for the future is financially sustainable. Today I have presented a four-year fiscal plan that is balanced. We've developed a \$1 billion ready-for-growth infrastructure plan to lead us into that future. To bring our hospitals, our schools, our roads, and our highways up to date requires the largest investment in public infrastructure in the history of our great province as we continue to strive to do better.

This budget ensures we'll keep our promises to the people of Saskatchewan. We'll follow up on every commitment I've announced today to ensure that every detail is done, right down to hammering the last nail.

Today Saskatchewan people are looking to the future with unprecedented hope and optimism. Yet in typical Saskatchewan fashion, there's a common sense sort of practicality in this optimism. They want it to be our unique own Saskatchewan brand of growth — growth that maintains everything that is great about this province: our high quality of life, our pristine environment, and our strong sense of community.

And they are asking, are we ready? Are we ready for all the opportunities that are coming our way? Are we ready to fulfill the endless possibilities the future has to offer? Are we ready for growth? I believe the answer is yes and that, years from now when future generations look back on this pivotal moment in our province's history, they will see that we did make the right choices. We did make the right investments in our future, and we were indeed ready for growth. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you. Thank you. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Saskatchewan Rivers:

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The minister has moved, seconded by the member from Saskatchewan Rivers:

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

Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Douglas Park.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the budget on behalf of the

NDP official opposition.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset let me point out that this first Saskatchewan Party budget is also the first balanced budget that had been tabled by a right wing government in Saskatchewan since Ross Thatcher in the 1960s. We think this is commendable. We want to congratulate the Finance minister on his place in history.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I remember a few years standing in this Assembly to deliver a budget to the people of Saskatchewan, and at that time the Saskatchewan Party called it a deficit budget. Back then the Fiscal Stabilization Fund which was in the budget was, to quote them, an NDP slush fund.

My, Mr. Speaker, how things have changed. So now that budget, that budget is being recognized by the Saskatchewan Party government as being a balanced budget — part of a string of 15 balanced budgets, Mr. Speaker. Now the Saskatchewan Party proudly points out to a \$1.3 billion Fiscal Stabilization Fund as an example of some management and fiscal common sense, Mr. Speaker. You know the saying, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. It's somewhat belated, but thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, there are some other similarities to a previous NDP budget. Millions of dollars for highways, new schools, hospitals, targeted tax cuts, and I could go on. Mr. Speaker, this government has taken the hard work of the NDP, the fiscal discipline of the NDP, and they have delivered a budget balanced with the money left behind by the NDP.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — In fact I would go so far as to categorize this as an NDP almost budget. It almost addresses all the needs of the people of the province. It almost delivers on the promise of Saskatchewan. It is almost a people's budget, and I say almost because we do have some concerns about this budget, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this budget does not do enough to address the need of people of Saskatchewan for property tax relief.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Both the NDP and the Saskatchewan Party campaigned on the recent election on this issue. I heard it on many doorsteps, particularly with the high seniors population in my constituency, seniors on fixed incomes who are crying out for a reduction in the education component of their property tax. This budget almost addresses that issue but not quite. There is some money set aside for property tax relief but not enough, Mr. Speaker, not nearly enough. It is not what was promised, and at a time when the government is sitting on a \$1.3 billion Fiscal Stabilization Fund, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this budget almost delivers on the necessary investment in environmental sustainability. There is some new

money to deal with what many say in Saskatchewan is the greatest challenge facing this province, this country, and this world, Mr. Speaker. I speak of course of climate change and CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions that are causing it. This budget almost addresses that issue but not quite.

Mr. Speaker, this government is taking advantage of the booming economy that the NDP helped to create in Saskatchewan, but what helps to fuel that economy, what helps to fuel that economy is skilled workforce, Mr. Speaker. That is something that the NDP government understood. That is what is why we continually invested in new training seats and new opportunities for people to get the training they needed to fully participate in the economy. This budget almost does that too. There's some investment in schools, colleges, and university. There's some expansion of the number of training seats available, but there's not enough.

Mr. Speaker, the government risk choking off the economy due to a lack of skilled workers. The Minister of Finance said that this budget was about being ready for growth, but without skilled workers there will be no growth. So there's almost a solution there, Mr. Speaker — almost. I would say this budget is almost ready for growth.

Our fourth and final area of concern, Mr. Speaker, is the critical area of housing, whether it's student housing, seniors housing, low-income housing, or the rising cost to rent. Everywhere we go in this province, the message is loud and clear. There is a housing crisis in Saskatchewan. This is an area where the budget falls short of being an NDP budget. There's nothing in this budget to address this issue. There's no hope for students, no hope for seniors, no hope for our northern citizens, no hope for renters.

We believe we need to invest in people. Given an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, we raised the minimum wage in government. We cut the sales tax. We created a new statutory holiday for working people to spend with their families. We made sure that all people benefited from the booming economy. We made sure our budgets were about people. This is almost a people's budget, Mr. Speaker, but not quite.

Mr. Speaker, I have identified four key areas in my remarks today, four key areas that make this almost a people's budget: property tax relief, the environment and climate change, skills training to put skilled people into the workforce, and the housing crisis. Mr. Speaker, what the members of the Saskatchewan Party never understood was that it's simply not enough to oppose for the sake of opposing, to criticize for the sake of criticizing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to propose some changes that could and should be made to this budget, changes that would make it better but still a far from perfect budget. First, I am calling on the Saskatchewan Party government to stop the studies and delays and implement their campaign promise on property taxes.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — This budget calls for the average homeowner to save \$133 a year. I want the Sask Party to keep

their promise and give the people of Saskatchewan \$450 a year.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — I want to point out the saving would be even more significant for our farmers and ranchers. Don't almost deal with the property tax issue; actually deal with it. The money is there to do it. Well do it.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I am calling on the government to double their commitment to increase funding for environmental change. On this side we are committed to the issue of climate change with dedicated funding and personnel. The Saskatchewan Party has adopted our targets for emission reductions, which is good, but they have cancelled much of the funding, which is bad. They almost got it right, Mr. Speaker, but not quite. Don't almost deal with the biggest issue that's facing our province, our country, and this world; start actually dealing with it.

Third, I am calling on the government to double the increase in the number of training seats. This budget will only increase the number of training seats in the province by 1,100. That is almost as much as we did last year, but not quite. Last year we added over 2,000 training seats in the province and there's absolutely no reason why the government cannot match or beat that number this year.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Don't almost be ready for growth; actually be ready for growth.

And my fourth and final proposal, Mr. Speaker, is as follows: start acting on the housing crisis facing this province. There has been enough study. There has been enough talk. The time for action is now. Don't almost deliver a people's budget; actually deliver a people's budget. Don't ignore this issue. Act on it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, thanks to the prudent fiscal management of the former government, there is a Fiscal Stabilization Fund in this budget worth \$1.3 billion.

This Saskatchewan Party government is sitting — to borrow a phrase — on a mountain of money. Take some of that money and make this budget a people's budget. Act on property tax relief like you said you were going to do. Act on climate change — the biggest issue facing our world. Act on being truly ready for growth by having the necessary skilled workers in the workforce. Act on the housing crisis. Deliver a people's budget.

Mr. Speaker, I will have far more to say on this tomorrow. But at this time, I would move to adjourn debate.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Douglas Park has moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Resumption of Budget Debate

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate on the motion that this Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government be resumed on Thursday, March 20, 2008.

I so move.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

That the debate on the motion that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government be resumed on Thursday, March 20, 2008.

Is the Assembly agreed to the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this very historic day, it's my pleasure to move that this House do now adjourn.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Before placing the question, I would just like to thank our guests for coming and joining us, and invite them to join the members for tea in room 218, to your left as you depart from the Chamber; and in the library to your right, the right hall as you depart from the Chamber.

The Government House Leader has moved that this House do now adjourn. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried. This Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 14:59.]

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