



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

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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

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Belanger, Buckley	NDP	Athabasca
Bjornerud, Hon. Bob	SP	Melville-Saltcoats
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Bradshaw, Fred	SP	Carrot River Valley
Brkich, Greg	SP	Arm River-Watrous
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Hart, Glen	SP	Last Mountain-Touchwood
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Hickie, Hon. Darryl	SP	Prince Albert Carlton
Higgins, Deb	NDP	Moose Jaw Wakamow
Hutchinson, Hon. Bill	SP	Regina South
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Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
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Taylor, Len	NDP	The Battlefords
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Trew, Kim	NDP	Regina Coronation Park
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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 10:00.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

The Speaker: — 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 services 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, Battleford, Prince Albert, and Regina. Thank you.

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 pleasure that I present a petition on behalf of Moose Jaw residents and for the improvement of health care in our region. 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.

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

I so present.

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

Mr. Michelson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby present a petition for private Bill on behalf of the Caronport schools:

Wherefore your petition humbly pray that your Hon. Assembly may be pleased to amend the Act to incorporate Caronport schools being chapter 101 of the statutes of Saskatchewan 1939 accordingly.

And in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

This is a name change for the Caronport schools, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Members, if I could ask for leave and your attention to move back to introduction of guests. First of all let me say it would be appreciated if members would remain in

their places. There was a lot of movement; it was difficult to see who was on their feet for introduction of guests.

And I would like to recognize the member from Yorkton.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you to all the members of this Assembly today, I'd like to recognize and acknowledge a person in your gallery today, someone that's no stranger to this gallery, a woman that wears very many hats — among mother, wife, fundraiser, to name a few. It just goes on and on. The woman that in no small part is responsible for why I'm here today as well, Mr. Speaker, my wife, Leone.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Easter Celebrations

Mr. LeClerc: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend Christians around the world will be gathering together to celebrate the Easter season. This Easter long weekend also allows family and friends to gather together to enjoy a holiday in the company of friends and family. No doubt, Mr. Speaker, people look forward to the Easter season as an opportunity for families to reunite at home.

This weekend is more than just a time of relaxation and good company though. Christians around the world celebrate the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Tonight we remember the Last Supper, and tomorrow Christians will gather on Good Friday to solemnly remember his sacrifice on the Cross.

Mr. Speaker, as the coming spring brings the renewal of nature, Easter Sunday allows us to gather in joy and celebration as we remember his resurrection and all that it stands for. As many know my background and my own resurrection through my faith, this is indeed a special time of celebration for myself, my family, and all those touched by his grace.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend best wishes on behalf of myself and my colleagues to all the residents of Saskatchewan on this joyous and blessed occasion. As it is written in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Caswell Community Association's Adopt-a-Grandparent Program

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout 2007

Caswell Community Association in Saskatoon, in conjunction with the 33rd Street Safeway, has raised funds towards the adopt-a-grandparent program. The Caswell Community Association envisions adopt-a-grandparent as a cross-generational program in which young and old alike can benefit from increased community participation. The first priority on the adopt-a-grandparent agenda was the creation of a volunteer-run snow removal program for seniors and persons with disabilities in the Caswell Hill area.

The Caswell Community Association extends its thanks to all community members for their donated time, money, and household items to make the fundraising a success particularly the employees of the 33rd Street Safeway.

The Caswell Community Association is one of the most vital and active in Saskatoon. The 33 Street Safeway and its employees are a keystone of the Caswell and Mayfair neighbourhoods. The 33rd Street Safeway is one of the few grocery stores of its size serving a core neighbourhood in Saskatoon. Its ongoing commitment to that community is invaluable to those who live there. The adopt-a-grandparent program is one example of the valuable partnerships between the Caswell Community Association and the 33rd Street Safeway.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Maidstone Pee Wee Jets

Mr. Chisholm: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With discussion in the media about youth and violence, I want to draw attention to a group of young men who have played their hearts out this season to the support and admiration of the people of Maidstone. The Maidstone Pee Wee Jets represent all our provincial youth who are working hard as a team to build something of value.

For the team this valuable effort has materialized as a 49-game season played with 215 goals for and 114 goals against. It should be noted that at one point this team travelled approximately 1,900 kilometres over just eight days to play five games. As a result of their effort and enthusiasm, the Jets have earned a spot in the provincial finals.

This is the type of dedication and spirit that not only makes great hockey players in the province and our country, but most importantly these are the same skills that develop confidence and leadership in our youth. You have inspired our community with your enthusiasm and have made us very proud to call your team our own. Special recognition to coach Kurt Freyman, assistant coach Wendall Weston, and trainer Leland Hanson — you have grown great leadership and team building.

I now ask all members — perhaps excluding the member from Arm River-Watrous because it's Wynyard that we will be in the finals against — to wish the Maidstone Pee Wee Jets the best of luck.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

The Battlefords Welcome New Immigrants

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the good work of The Battleford's immigrant support committee and the people of The Battlefords who are welcoming a very large number of new citizens and working as best they can on the challenges facing our community in general.

During the last two years, the people of The Battlefords have welcomed more than 300 immigrants, and based on information available today, in the next two years we will welcome in addition 40 Serbian families and 20 Chinese individuals.

The Battlefords have benefited greatly from the support and encouragement of the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program and will continue to do the work necessary to attract new residents to help the region deal with its growing labour shortage. At the same time, the support committee has been helping get our new residents settled, including language support, appliance and furniture support, banking, transportation, and of course housing.

Housing is a significant challenge for the community, and additional provincial support would be most welcomed. Immigrants need affordable and accessible housing options. So too do our First Nations people moving into the community, students attending enhanced programming at North West Regional College, and young people also moving into the community for job and educational opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the hard work of the volunteers and contributors to the immigrant support committee in The Battlefords in welcoming the new residents to the community and committing ourselves to ensure that there are adequate, accessible, and affordable housing opportunities for everyone.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Best Wishes for Mayor's Speedy Recovery

Mr. Michelson: — I would ask the Assembly to join me in extending best wishes to the Mayor of Moose Jaw, Dale McBain. Mayor McBain went into surgery early this week to replace a valve in his heart. I'm happy to report the surgery went well, and Mayor McBain is resting comfortably, recovering in the Regina General Hospital. I understand he's already sitting up and will be returning to Moose Jaw in his home in a few days.

As you're aware, Mr. Speaker, although the procedure is not uncommon, there's always an element of risk, and we're thankful that the procedure went well. Mayor McBain plans to be back in council by the end of April. In the meantime, we know that his optimistic leadership will be missed. However he assures us that the city is in good hands with the existing council and staff.

Please join me, with all the citizens of Moose Jaw, in extending the best wishes for a comfortable stay and a speedy recovery to Mayor McBain. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

International Women's Day Banquet

Mr. Furber: — Mr. Speaker, this month I had the pleasure of attending of an event hosted by the Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission. The event, Mr. Speaker, was the International Women's Day Banquet.

The women's commission believes that International Women's Day is an important time to recognize the achievements of women and the leadership that women provide. In a statement by the women's commission they proclaim, "By honouring the outstanding achievements of women, we not only provide role models but also recognition for the countless contributions they make to their families and communities."

Mr. Speaker, one woman from each PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council] First Nation — 12 women in all — were honoured at the banquet in honour of outstanding women everywhere.

Welcoming remarks were given by Shirley Henderson, Chair of the women's commission. Mr. Speaker, that evening she was also presented the PAGC Women of the Year by Grand Chief Ron Michel, Vice-Chief Ed Henderson, Vice-Chief Don Deranger, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, and Chief Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth. Entertainment was provided by a tremendous young upcoming artist, a Juno-nominated writer from the Dene Nation of Yellowknife, Leela Gilday.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join with me in acknowledging the contributions made by the women of the Prince Albert Grand Council First Nations and in congratulating the PAGC Women's Commission on a tremendously successful evening. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Provincial Budget

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People across the province woke up smiling this morning. For the first time in years they got a budget that has its eyes firmly on the road ahead, not on the rear-view mirror.

While there have been many positive things said about this government's first budget, perhaps our biggest compliment came from the members opposite — yes, Mr. Speaker, from none other than that backwards-looking NDP [New Democratic Party]. The former Finance minister described our *Ready for Growth* budget as almost NDP. He couldn't be more right. It was nothing like an NDP budget.

Take their record on property tax. In the 2003 election campaign, they promised to cut property tax. But in the first budget after the election, they broke that promise and raised the PST [provincial sales tax].

In this past election, Mr. Speaker, our government promised to cut property taxes. And, Mr. Speaker, this government did cut property taxes — a promise kept, Mr. Speaker, a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker, not only did the members opposite fail to plan, but when they were in power, they planned to fail. This government is planning to succeed, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:15]

Hon. Mr. Wall: — With leave, Mr. Speaker, with leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. I recognize the Premier.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we were underway in proceedings, a very special guest joined us here in the Legislative Assembly. Seated in your gallery with Elaine Kivisto from my office is Pamela Wallin who has joined us here today.

And if I may, Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to have Pamela join us today in the Legislative Assembly. I don't know if there are many more famous exports from the province of Saskatchewan than Pamela, educated at the University of Regina here and, but for a fill-in stint on an open-line show, may have been lost to Canadian journalism and then to the world of diplomacy as well as entrepreneurship.

Currently Pamela continues to promote the province of Saskatchewan, has served her country with respect to the task force on Afghanistan, is on the board of Oilsands Quest, and therefore promoting Saskatchewan wherever she goes. We had the good fortune, for the Minister of Energy and myself, in meeting with Pamela and others about energy opportunities in the province while we were there. And she again helped certainly promote the province and put us in touch with the right people that can increase investment.

So I would ask all members to join with me in welcoming Ms. Wallin to this Legislative Assembly today.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Calvert: — With leave to also welcome Ms. Wallin.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Mr. Calvert: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the opposition, I would want to also welcome Pamela Wallin to our Chamber today — no stranger to this legislature, certainly no stranger to the province of Saskatchewan, one of the few citizens in our province who has a street named after her in her hometown and one who has done an exceptional amount of work on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, no matter what her career path — whether it was her time in journalism or representing our nation in New York City.

And so we welcome Ms. Wallin again to this legislature, to her home province of Saskatchewan.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Property Taxes

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday we saw more flip-flops than we could see from two trapeze artists flipping pancakes on top of a cement mixer, Mr. Speaker. We saw the Saskatchewan Party flip-flop on deficit. When we were in government, the budgets had deficits. Now that they're there, no, they weren't deficits; they were in fact balanced budgets. We saw them flip-flop on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. No, a year ago it was a slush fund. No, today it's sound management.

They flip-flop on spending. When it was our budget, it was unsustainable; and today they're spending even more, Mr. Speaker. But the biggest flip-flop of all was on property taxes. They campaigned in the election on property tax relief and yesterday they failed to deliver anything substantial.

To the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker: isn't his back just a little bit sore from all the flip-flopping he's been doing?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today, the first day after an historic budget in the province of Saskatchewan, and reply in answer to the questions posed by the member opposite. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's rare in this Assembly where you have an opportunity, after having worked on a budget for four solid months — it was the shortest time that we've had possibly to do this — and to be able to realize on virtually all of our campaign commitments. Mr. Speaker, we've kept our promises and that

was very important to us.

We are going to make sure that this province is ready for growth. What we saw in the past is the province was ready for growth but the opposition had so badly neglected the infrastructure that the infrastructure was not ready for growth. And so, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure that the economic momentum continues into the future so that all of our citizens can benefit from this economic growth. Mr. Speaker, it was very, very prideful for me to stand in this House and deliver on these promises, and I look forward to further questions from the member opposite.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote from an article from *The StarPhoenix*, and it says, quote:

While the Sask. Party took office warning of "stark" finances given the previous government's spending patterns, this budget sees a 10 per cent hike [in spending] over the previous budget and about five per cent more than was actually spent last year.

At the same time, sitting in the bank untouched will be \$1.3 billion in the government's new growth and financial . . . [stability] fund . . .

Money for everything, Mr. Speaker, and \$1.3 billion in the bank. Why can't they take \$120 million to spend to fulfill their property tax commitment? To the Minister of Finance: why won't he keep this promise?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantefoer: — Well, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure realizing on our commitments to provide meaningful property tax relief — \$165 million is meaningful in our calculations — as well as the commitment to further look at a permanent plan in order to bring closure to this issue over the years.

You know it's very interesting because the NDP have been looking and promising and alluding to property tax relief virtually since August 31, 1944 when then premier, Tommy Douglas, said, and I quote: "We are pledged to do away with the education tax as soon as we get new sources of revenue to take the place of the revenue now realized from that tax."

Tommy Douglas in 1944 started the promises of the NDP government that haven't been realized from then until today. The Sask Party has delivered.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Douglas

Park.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Well, Mr. Speaker, he said that they delivered, that they'd kept their promise. Let me quote from their platform, Mr. Speaker, in big, bold letters: "Doubling education property tax rebates, saving the average homeowner \$450 a year." But what did they deliver, Mr. Speaker? Let me just quote from the *National Post*. The rebate, quote, "The rebate homeowners get on education property tax bills was increased to 12 per cent from 10 per cent, saving the average homeowner an extra \$27 a year."

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I realize that members on both sides have a lot of opinions in regards to the budget, but right now we have one member trying to place a question. I'd ask members to give that member the respect. Member from Regina Douglas Park, please place your question.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Let me just restate that, Mr. Speaker, that on the education portion of property tax increasing it from 12 to 10 per cent, saving the average homeowner an extra \$27 a year. What did they promise? — \$450 a year. What did they deliver? — \$27 a year. Meaningful? Seven and a half cents a day. When will he stand up and keep his promise, Mr. Speaker?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Gantfoer: — Well, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, it's really interesting that on this first day after the budget to have the member from Regina Douglas Park on his feet asking questions of myself. It really is interesting because I'd like to refer back to the 2003 election when right after the election the member opposite said this, and I quote from the *Regina Leader-Post* January 14, 2004:

"Why don't parties like to talk about tax hikes during elections? Well I don't know. I suspect that anyone who talks about tax hikes is not likely to be very popular during the course of an election campaign."

I recall that, Mr. Speaker. That member stood on his feet and then announced a 1 per cent increase in the provincial sales tax and said nothing about it — in fact gave this quote and this reason why they weren't saying anything about it. And you of all people should not be lecturing me about credibility.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'd just like to ask the members if they could just — I know there's a lot of excitement and anticipation — but just cool it a little bit would be greatly appreciated. The member from Moose Jaw Wakamow.

Revenue Sharing with Municipalities

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over 18 months of work has been done already by municipalities to come up with a long-term solution to the issue of revenue sharing. Now all that hard work has just been tossed

out the window by the Sask Party, their policy, and this budget.

Allan Earle, president of SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association], made comments on the budget yesterday and I quote, "Property owners are going to see a mill rate increase across the board in most communities." In other words, taxes are going up in most communities around this province. The minister has said that he's anxious to start discussions, but he's not that anxious because he isn't starting till October, for crying out loud.

To the minister: why is this budget only giving \$27 of property tax relief on one hand, and forcing municipalities to raise taxes with the other?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister for municipal government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked and appalled that the member opposite would even have the temerity to raise the issue of revenue sharing with members of the House. Revenue sharing, after all, is an issue that municipalities north and south, rural and urban, large and small in this great province have been waiting for a solution for 16 years. They had 16 years to get the job done, Mr. Speaker, and they didn't get it done. They're expecting a solution in 16 weeks. I don't understand that, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that the people of Saskatchewan don't either.

We made a commitment in the campaign to raise revenue sharing by 7 per cent and we have kept that promise in yesterday's budget. Promise made; promise kept. Another campaign promise that we made, Mr. Speaker, was to revive the negotiations . . .

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, we also had comments yesterday from Regina's . . .

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday we also had comments from the mayor of Regina, Pat Fiocco. And what did he have to say about the budget? Well when asked, his comments were, and I quote: "[And] I can tell the citizens of Regina there will definitely be a property tax increase this year." The mayor of Saskatoon echoed similar comments.

To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: where does it say in the Sask Party platform or in the policies that they are going to force municipalities to raise taxes for the people of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why in this budget are they only giving \$27 to homeowners on property tax relief and forcing

municipalities to raise their taxes to fund their communities?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Mr. Speaker, before we were interrupted, we were in the process of reminding members of the House that the second campaign promise we made was to revive discussions about a new revenue-sharing agreement — a long-term solution — something that municipalities have been waiting for 16 years.

We don't have to turn the clock back to find out what happened with revenue sharing and property taxes. I have a document here which I'll be delighted to table. What happened when the former government was in power in the 1990s? They clawed back \$300 million from revenue sharing — \$100 million from the city of Regina alone, \$100 million from the city of Saskatoon alone, and a third . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I call members to order. The minister may finish his comments.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, \$300 million were clawed back from the revenue-sharing grant pool by that former government, crippling the ability of cities, towns, and villages and RMs [rural municipality] to address their infrastructure and other pressing needs.

What did they do after 2000? There were ad hoc increases varied all the way from . . .

The Speaker: — The member's time has elapsed.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — The member from Saskatoon Centre.

Housing Crisis

Mr. Forbes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier yesterday modestly referred to yesterday's budget as historic. Although not quite as historic as the medicare budget or our own first balanced NDP budget after Grant Devine, yesterday's budget was historic in that, within hours of the Finance minister tabling it, he was already admitting that it failed to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people. Now that must be a record, Mr. Speaker.

The Finance minister couldn't deny his government had ignored affordable housing and, according to the *Leader-Post*, admitted his budget didn't go as far as he would have liked on social issues.

Well, Mr. Speaker, as the old saying goes, he who holds the purse strings holds the power, and that minister failed to use the billion extra dollars at his disposal to help families suffering from the housing crisis.

To the Minister of Finance: how does he explain his first budget's failure to address affordable housing when his own

Social Services minister admits that Saskatchewan is in a housing crisis?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[10:30]

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

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly exciting times in Saskatchewan, and we had an exciting budget on how we're preparing for growth. And it's surprising to me when we have that member stand up and say, what are we doing about affordable housing? I will say what I said yesterday. That government was unaware that we were in a crisis, quite frankly, until the eve of the election. For 16 years they had to address the housing crisis.

Mr. Bob Pringle, a very credible man who has a passion for social issues who I'm very honoured to have on the task force that I have announced, said yesterday when he was being interviewed on the John Gormley show, he said this, Mr. Speaker:

Well if I look back to three years ago when we had an independent study done at the Saskatoon Food Bank, I was saying clearly to government that the clients at the food bank were spending 70 per cent of their income on shelter. There's nothing left. And the issue wasn't addressed.

They were the government at that time, Mr. Speaker. What did they do?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Forbes: — Well, Mr. Speaker, housing was shockingly absent from the government's budget yesterday, leaving many feeling that this government has forgotten the very people it's tasked to protect. Peter Gilmer of, the Regina anti-poverty minister, accurately pointed out that while the the government invested substantially in economic infrastructure, they failed to address social infrastructure in this budget.

Students also felt this budget missed the mark. Despite holding protests and repeatedly drawing the attention of government to the need to address student housing, they went home empty-handed yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Social Services: how does this government look students and families in the eye after this budget which sees \$1.3 billion just sitting in the bank and no dollars for affordable housing?

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, Mr. Speaker. Again I would like to say that the NDP, when they were in government just prior to the election, did a study and introduced a number of programs. The students had already started their classes at that time. They knew there was a shortage. Was there anything in their proposal for students? No, Mr. Speaker, there was not.

Now the member opposite maybe doesn't know, but in the Estimates book the Sask Housing Corporation does not list their numbers in that document. However, there is \$71.5 million being spent on an existing 856 units that are in development as we speak. There's an additional \$47.5 million that's being dedicated. Going forward, we have 84 submissions on different groups that want to partner with government on different housing units. We're putting out an expression of interest to spend an additional \$18.4 million on Métis housing and First Nations housing. Mr. Speaker, that's \$137.4 million.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Member's time has elapsed. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Training Opportunities

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, did the labour shortage get solved while I wasn't looking or is *Ready for Growth* just more empty rhetoric from the Sask Party? About a year ago, the members opposite stood in their places and voted against an NDP budget that provided over 2,000 new training spaces — spaces so critical to the training needs of Saskatchewan people and the health of this province's booming economy.

Curious, Mr. Speaker, that at a time when our economy is booming like it is, they decided to slash this number in half — in half, Mr. Speaker. A half NDP budget that goes halfway towards addressing the issues. That doesn't sound like readiness to me.

To the minister: does he honestly believe that this budget — a budget which cuts the expansion of new training seats in half as compared to last year — is actually adequate to meet the needs of Saskatchewan people?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the question. Mr. Speaker, what I can begin by saying is that in the last 30 days, because of the new co-operative arrangement and environment on fed-prov relations, we've seen over \$100 million invested by Ottawa in Saskatchewan on education and training seats. That's during the last 30 days.

What I can then turn and say, Mr. Speaker, is obviously the member opposite should do a little better job going through the budget documents because if we look at training opportunities when combined with new service opportunities relating to immigrant settlement and other initiatives, there are close to

4,000 initiatives that would come under training. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I think the issue actually is about reconceiving the notion of training and education so it becomes a continuum.

Mr. Speaker, there are over 67,000 training and educational seats in Saskatchewan and that's how we're going to sustain the growth of our province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Mr. Speaker, I thought the non-LRB [Labour Relations Board] questions might be kinder to the minister, but I'm afraid his problems run deeper than the nature of the questions. I'm also curious, Mr. Speaker, if those government backbenchers on that side — the ones like the member from Wood River who have made a career of fighting the evil communists — whether they will support this almost-NDP budget.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, the member from Swift Current issued a little report entitled, *Getting Saskatchewan Back on . . .*

The Speaker: — Order. A few too many debates taking place on the floor, which makes it difficult to hear the questioner. I recognize the member from Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — A little report entitled, *Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track*. The report dealt with, quote, "The Immediate Labour Shortage Crisis." Back when the Sask Party was in opposition, they said this labour shortage was an immediate crisis. But now that they have a chance to act, all we see is less of the same. If the Sask Party did have any sense of urgency, it seems to have vanished quicker than the dainties at a post-budget tea. To the Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour: if he truly believes that the labour shortage is such a crisis, why doesn't he do something about it?

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: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In anticipating questions like this, I thought what we'd do is, within my ministry, we'd produce our own document, Mr. Speaker, and that way what we can do is just point to one initiative. This is through the Aboriginal skills employment partnership, which was just announced in the last 10 days. Fifteen hundred First Nation and Métis people will have the opportunity to participate at higher skill levels in the resource industries in northern Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, there's just one example of the type of initiative that comes with the new era of co-operation between Ottawa and Regina as we're focusing on sustaining our growth. Mr. Speaker, it's time that we can just look at some empirical evidence and see that we are investing in the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Budget Implications for First Nations and Métis People

Mr. McCall: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Finance minister cited a First Nations proverb about how we borrow the land from our children. I'd like to remind this government of another saying that is sometimes used in Métis and First Nations circles, and it goes like this: talk is cheap.

And with this budget we find out just how cheap Sask Party talk really is when it comes to First Nations and Métis people. Most major new money in the budget came from the gaming agreement that was signed by the NDP, and when it comes to Sask Party initiatives, they did things like cut the First Nations and Métis business development fund right in half while sitting on \$1.3 billion.

For this budget, FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] Chief Lawrence Joseph said, and I quote, "It amounts to zero for First Nations." President Robert Doucette of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan said, "There wasn't near enough in the budget to help Métis people share in the benefits of the booming economy."

To the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations: how can she and that government be so out of touch with the challenges facing the Métis and First Nations people in Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister responsible for First Nations affairs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, to the members opposite: I am very pleased with the way the government is dealing with the First Nations and Métis people in the province. We have an opportunity in this government to social housing. The minister talked about the opportunities for Aboriginal housing. We have Métis having 13.3 million . . . homes; First Nations, 13.1 million; for a total of \$26.4 million.

And the roads: we have spent \$11.3 million on Witchehan Lake road. We spent \$6.1 million on northern road strategy, and 26.2 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'd ask members to come to order please. I recognize the minister.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Mr. Speaker, it's amazing that they don't want to hear the good news of the First Nations and Métis people in this province. We're also spending money for forest fighting and ensuring that the people will be able to be involved in that industry and that work. SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] actually received more money so we can have additional training seats as well. The Minister of Advanced Education talked about the 1,500 Aboriginal self-employment seats that will be in the budget as well. Thank

you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. McCall: — I guess I'll say it again, Mr. Speaker. Talk is cheap, and no amount of glossy brochures will make that up.

Less than a month ago the federal government brought down their budget as well. As usual, the members across the way tripped all over themselves to congratulate the Stephen Harper Conservatives on their big budget. In fact the Leader of the Sask Party said, and I quote, "This demonstrates . . . there is an understanding of Saskatchewan priorities by the prime minister . . ."

What did First Nations have to say? National Chief Phil Fontaine called the budget, quote, a "bitter disappointment and a lost opportunity . . ." FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] Chief Lawrence Joseph said, quote, "This budget is a tool of oppression . . ."

Now we know that the Sask Party talked from one end of this province to another about building a new relationship in Saskatchewan . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Without naming members — but we're getting close — I'm going to call on the member from Regina Elphinstone-Centre to place his question.

Mr. McCall: — Now we know that the Sask Party has placed a lot of talk about building a new relationship in Saskatchewan with First Nations and Métis people. My question is to the Premier: when he talked to First Nations and Métis people about a new relationship, why didn't he tell them it would be one based on the failed approach of the Stephen Harper Conservatives?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the minister responsible for the First Nations and Métis affairs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Why don't we just talk about the failed approach of the previous government in Saskatchewan? Why don't we talk about what the previous government actually says about First Nations when it talked of consultation and allowing them to be part of the government and be part of the economy? Why don't we talk about the fact that there was a guidelines book produced by the NDP government to talk about First Nations and allow them to be part of the economy, and they didn't even consult with them? And our government has put \$3 million into consultation this year so that First Nations people . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order. The minister can complete her comments.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This

government is proud to say we've put \$3 million into consultation funds for this year so that First Nations people and Métis people have the opportunity to be involved in the economy. We did not write something without their approval, without their consultation.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I ask members to come to order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 17 — The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2008

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 17, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2008 be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — Will the members please come to order. The member from Moose Jaw North, the member from Athabasca, please come to order.

The Minister of Highways has moved first reading of Bill No. 17, The Highways and Transportation Amendment Act, 2008 be now read a first time. Is the Assembly ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Speaker: — Agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Carried.

Clerk: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time? I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, next sitting of the House.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

[10:45]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government, it's my pleasure to table answers to questions 380 to 408.

The Speaker: — Questions 380 to 408 tabled. I recognize the member from Biggar.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to

convert question 409 to a notice of motion for return.

The Speaker: — Question 409 converted to a motion for return. I recognize the Government Whip.

Mr. Weekes: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table answers to question 410 to 415.

The Speaker: — Questions 410 to 415 tabled.

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. Gantfoer that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.]

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, without repeating myself, I would like to simply review some of the areas, shortcomings in this budget that I identified yesterday.

We zeroed in on the issue of property tax relief, that this budget could have been more substantial. We zeroed in on the question of skills training to put skilled people to work in the workforce — a criticism of a budget that in our view simply didn't do enough in that area. We talked about the fact that there is no marker in this budget to deal with the report that is forthcoming with respect to affordable housing. So even if there's a report that may suggest recommendations for improvement to the government, there's nothing in the budget to address the housing crisis that is very real in our major cities, and we're also getting an indication from other cities, towns, and villages that they too are seeing a shortage of affordable housing.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, we raised the question of the environment and climate change, the fact that the previous government had set aside a fund of 300-plus millions of dollars for environmental sustainability fund that could be tapped into to support worthwhile initiatives to deal with climate change. And that this particular budget had in fact taken that money, put it into infrastructure which is necessary to, you know, have the money for infrastructure but really doing very little in terms of the whole issue of climate change which is very important to the people of Saskatchewan.

I'd like to just expound a little bit on some of those areas if I might, Mr. Speaker.

First of all with respect to taxes . . . and this is something that people who watch the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, who follow politics, they kind of know if there's a philosophical distinction between the right in society and the left in society, that is that the right takes the point of view that there should

always be less government, that government should be doing less, that people should rely on their own devices to pay for the services that they need.

So for example, the right takes the point of view people should pay for their own health care. They should buy their own health care insurance, that the right takes the point of view that if you need schooling, well you pay the tuition for the school that your child has to attend. And the right says that when you do that, you're able to cut taxes substantially because it's those taxes that support health care and education and other worthwhile government programs.

So the right takes the point of view that government should always be about cutting taxes. And that's certainly something that the members over the years, I think, have consistently articulated. I think it's fair to say that there isn't a tax cut that, over the years, that hasn't been embraced by the members opposite.

The members opposite argued for of course lowering the income tax. They had a favourite income tax change to benefit low-income people that they've talked a lot about. In fact they came out one day with a list of 100 ideas and, you know, the top of the list, the top of the list — and it shouldn't surprise us coming from a right-of-centre party — top of the list is reduce provincial income tax, in this case for low-income residents.

So, you know, they embrace the notion of tax cuts. They embrace the notion of cuts in the sales tax. In fact I do remember the member for Kindersley on one occasion voting for a budget put forward by the NDP because that budget lowered the sales tax. And so again they support tax cuts. This is a party, the Saskatchewan Party, that over the years has argued for cuts in corporation taxes. This is a party that also argued for cuts in property taxes. In fact, you know, I think it's fair to say again there's not a tax cut they didn't like.

In this last election, the Sask Party campaigned on extending the property tax credit, the credit that appears on people's property tax bills for the education portion of property tax, that it should be extended, should be increased — doubled if you like — from what was there previously, and I'm really . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would like to call members to order and allow members to hear the member from Regina Douglas Park in his response to the budget speech. Member from Regina Douglas Park.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So this is a party that campaigned on doubling the amount of property tax relief that was inherent in previous NDP budgets. That's what they campaigned on. And, you know, it must come as a huge disappointment, a huge disappointment for those that support that right-of-centre party, the Saskatchewan Party, it must come as a huge disappointment for those who shared, you know, or had this philosophical belief about less government and less taxes to see nothing really being delivered that they can see.

Yes, there are selective tax cuts. We support those. We think those are good. But, you know, in terms of broad-based tax relief, I think all their supporters who had this philosophical

belief about less government and less taxes, they will be very, very disappointed in the budget that's arrived today.

To have a government say, you know, the best that we can do, the best that we can do on the one hand is to provide for on average a \$27-a-year decrease in the education portion of the property tax which works to about seven and a half cents a day . . . Is that what it works out to? Somebody at home will have a calculator and work this out. Twenty-seven dollars divided by 365, 366 in a leap year. Oh no we've finished that year. But, you know, the amount of tax relief is simply insignificant.

And the question arises as well, will there in fact be property tax relief for the people of Saskatchewan? Will there be property tax relief? We have a government on the one hand that is proposing to provide, as I indicated, an average relief of \$27 for the coming year — \$27. On the other hand, on the other hand they have decreased the increases that we had received from . . .

The Speaker: — Order, order. I would ask members to allow the member to place his response. And I know how difficult that it is to keep a train of thought if members are always interfering, so I'd invite the member from Regina Douglas Park to continue his response.

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the question here is there in fact any broad-base tax relief for the people of Saskatchewan? We don't have the complete answer to that yet. But we got an inkling of what might take place when we look at the comments of some of the mayors and municipal leaders in Saskatchewan, who say that the amount of money that's been provided in this budget to assist municipalities to deal with the pressing needs that they have in their society for operating costs — to pay for policing service, pay for fire services, pay for all the services that property tax payers need in this province — when they look at the budget, they are convinced . . . Mayor of Regina is very convinced, and I think my colleagues referred to this in question period, that the people of Regina will see a property tax increase on account of this budget. Those were comments that were echoed, I believe, by the mayor of Saskatoon.

Those were comments that were also echoed by the leader of all urban municipalities in Saskatchewan — Allan Earle, the mayor of Dalmeny and the president of Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association — where he too warns of property tax increases.

So those who support the Sask Party — those of the right wing — may well be asking, what is it that my government is doing for me? What is it that my government is doing to act on my beliefs? What is it that the Government of Saskatchewan is doing to ensure that there is broad-based tax relief for all the people of Saskatchewan? Well I think the answer to that is going to be coming clear when property tax bills comes out, and I think the answer will be a big fat zero, Mr. Speaker.

So and I just might say that, you know, more than appealing to their philosophical base, the Saskatchewan Party is simply not being sensitive to what is taking place in Saskatchewan where we see housing prices rising; more and more people, because of housing acquisition, having to put more and more money in to

their mortgages. If there was ever a time for a government to be sensitive to the question of affordable housing, people of Saskatchewan, the time is now. And again they should've acted I think far more substantially than they did in this budget to be sensitive to the needs of Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the question of skills training. What we know, and Saskatchewan businesses know, is that if your economy is expanding, if there is growth and development taking place, if there is an increasing need for workers to do the skilled jobs that are required to support this economic development, then we need more people with skilled trades to in fact do that. That is one of the reasons why, in a previous budget, the NDP government moved aggressively, substantially, to increase the number of spaces for skilled trades in our budget; to have these skilled trades graduate from our technical schools — from SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology] and the like.

Well, you know, I've got to say, and I think many business leaders will say that this budget is a huge disappointment and raises some real questions about how we can sustain the economic momentum that we have in our province. How can we sustain that momentum if we risk choking off the economic gains we are making because we're not keeping pace with the demand for skilled trades in Saskatchewan? That is a real source of concern.

Now many people say, well we'll be able to attract skilled trades from other jurisdictions. And yes, to some extent we will be able to attract skilled trades from other jurisdictions, although we've got to just put a little marker, a little asterisk on that, is that because of rising housing prices, Saskatchewan may not be quite as attractive for people from out of province as it once might have been. And we risk, Mr. Speaker, we risk taking place something that American philosopher Yogi Berra once talked about when he was asked about a popular restaurant. He said, well that place is so popular no one goes there any more.

And so we have to be very careful of what Mr. Berra had to say, and we need to be very careful in Saskatchewan that we don't rely — that we do not rely — on skilled trades coming from other parts of Canada to pick up the need that is here in our province. We need to ensure that we are putting the investment in to ensure that Saskatchewan young people — Saskatchewan young people — don't have to stand in line at our technical institutes to get the training they need, to get the skills they need so that they can be gainfully employed in this economy. That's what we need to do, and this budget falls far short of that, Mr. Speaker.

And I'm not the only person that's indicating that in fact the emphasis should in fact be on skills training. I had a meeting with the Institute of Chartered Accountants prior to this budget. That's what they indicated was a priority item for government expenditure, was to focus on skills training. And simply put, we're not seeing that in this budget to the extent that is necessary and will be seen to be necessary in the coming months and years in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker. So I think from that particular point this budget is a huge disappointment.

[11:00]

They're disappointing Saskatchewan young people who had hopes of more opportunities. They're going to be disappointing those people that are involved in the economy, and those people especially involved in construction, that they're going to be disappointing those people when they see their ability to carry through on projects is going to be impaired because of a lack of skilled trades. So we had hoped that this government too might be, you know, just a little bit smarter about the whole issue of economic growth and what's really required to support economic growth in Saskatchewan. But we again are very disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that I raised yesterday was the question of housing affordability. Again, there's questions raised in this Assembly. I think we need to concern ourselves with this question. This is one of the areas that frankly got away from the Government of Alberta where they've seen rapid growth over the years. This is one of the areas that the Alberta government has been struggling over the years to keep up with. And we need to not just talk about learning from the experience in Alberta, Mr. Speaker; we actually need to make commitments in our budgets to ensure we don't repeat the mistakes that have been made in Alberta.

One of the things that happens when housing prices increase, when the demand for housing increase, one of the things we know happens is that those who live on the margins of society, those people with disabilities, including people with mental health issues, Mr. Speaker . . . When we talk about low-income people on the margins of society, when we talk about students who live on the margins of society and we talk about some low-income seniors who live on the margins of society, those are the people that are most directly affected when we see this intense competition for housing in Saskatchewan.

And I know that the party opposite says well you know, the private sector will take care of that; more housing will be built and so on. But I'm not too sure that that trickle-down theory is going to work fast enough for the many hundreds, thousands of people of Saskatchewan who fit into, who live if you like on the margins of society.

And I think that this budget has failed those people. This budget has failed to put into place a marker so that funding will be there when they finally receive their report about what should be done — although I think they have the answers already — about what should be done that in fact there's a concrete commitment to ensure something will be done, Mr. Speaker. And it's simply not there in the budget.

And again as I indicated earlier, we need to also concern ourselves about the question of housing affordability so that young families who are starting out, young families of limited means, have the opportunity in Saskatchewan to invest in their own home in this province as opposed to, like many other jurisdictions, having to live in substandard housing, having to double up on housing, having to forego choices for many years in terms of housing. We want to ensure that the advantage that young families have had in Saskatchewan over the years, that that is an advantage that is continued. And again there's nothing in that budget that really addresses that issue, Mr. Speaker. So from my point of view, the budget is a failure on those grounds as well.

And you know, one of the tests that we have as members of the Legislative Assembly, as elected people, is to ensure that whatever else takes place, that we reach out and we do the kind of things that need to be done to support the people on margins in society, to support the people who are least able to look after themselves, that we do something to support them. And this budget fails that, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, the budget reflects a rather interesting set of events that the Premier earlier on signalled after their election, and that concerns the question of the environment, sustainable environment, the question of CO₂ emissions and climate change, greenhouse gas emissions.

And that is the fact that the previous government sold its share in an upgrader in Regina. And the net gain from the sale of that upgrader was put into a special fund within the Crown sector to support worthwhile environmental initiatives as we go forward, so that the government has the flexibility to invest in those ideas, invest in those proposals that have a chance of ensuring that Saskatchewan people — Saskatchewan people, like other people in Canada and people throughout the world — are doing their bit to slow down the greenhouse gas emission that we're seeing, slow down the carbon dioxide emission that we're seeing.

Well the first thing that this government did was to take that money that had been set aside for that fund, transfer that money to the General Revenue Fund so it could be used to bump up infrastructure in Saskatchewan — more schools and so on.

And we appreciate the additional funds for schools and other infrastructure. But you know what? It leaves a huge hole. It leaves a huge hole — a huge hole — for Saskatchewan people in terms of how we support environmental sustainability, how we go forward, how it is that we as a government, as a people make the kind of investments that are needed to deal adequately with the challenges that the environment puts before us. And I think there's broad agreement, broad agreement even from the members opposite who derided and hooted and hollered about things like our greenhouse gas emissions and that it was just some plot by scientists that scientists talked about.

Finally, I think they too have come to the realization that the question of greenhouse gas emission, the impact on the environment, climate change, is in fact a number one priority for governments — whether it's local here in Saskatchewan, whether it's national and international — and the time for action is now.

We are very disappointed that even though they reluctantly have agreed with the emission targets that we identified for Saskatchewan, when it comes time for funding the initiative that might actually help us deal with that, they cut that, Mr. Speaker. And that remains as an unsolved, that remains as an unattended to major challenge for the people of Saskatchewan and this government. And again, I think they've failed us miserably on that particular score.

Mr. Speaker, I've dealt with the four points that I covered very briefly in my budget yesterday — the question of property tax relief, the question of skills training, the question of affordable housing, the question of environmental sustainability.

I'd like to just deal with one other item before I take my place, and that's the question of transfers from the federal government, Mr. Speaker. The forecast for the '07-08 fiscal year — which we are completing now and will be completed in a matter of days — the forecast is that the Saskatchewan government will have received \$1.6 billion from the federal government. \$1.6 billion for support for programs such as health and in education, support in other programs that we have where they've committed to funding, also some support last year for a program called equalization.

So the forecast for this current fiscal year that we're in, which will expire in a few days, is that we will receive from the federal government, the people of Canada, the total sum of \$1.6 billion — 1.6 billion. What do we see in this budget as the government's estimate as to revenues from the federal government for the coming year? \$1.3 billion, Mr. Speaker.

So what we are seeing here is less money forthcoming from the federal government than we did during the current fiscal year. And I tell you, this has to be a source of concern for the people of Saskatchewan. It certainly is a concern for members of both sides of the House because we know that one of the reasons that we have an infrastructure deficit in Saskatchewan, relative to many other jurisdictions, is not only because of the debt legacy left governments after the profligate spending in the 1980s by Mr. Devine and company — some of which those members are associated with — but also because, consistently over the years, Saskatchewan has not been able to get the kind of equalization treatment that other provinces had been receiving, where our resource, non-renewable resource revenues have continued to be clawed back to determine equalization entitlements, even though, even though the federal government has entered into agreement with other provinces to ensure that doesn't take place.

Even though there are peculiar aspects of the equalization program that benefit provinces like Manitoba with their hydroelectric revenues, Saskatchewan has not seen any of that benefit. And so this is a huge source of concern, Mr. Speaker, and one of the reasons that we have things like an infrastructure deficit.

Well what we had take place here in Saskatchewan is a federal government, a federal party that finally recognized, finally recognized that the people of Saskatchewan have been getting the shaft — finally recognized it; said, look we're going to do something about it. We commit, we commit when we're elected as a federal party to form the federal government, we commit to ensure that non-renewable resource revenues will be excluded from equalization entitlement for Saskatchewan.

What does that mean? Well in dollar terms, it means roughly \$800 million a year. I think this year it might've meant \$850 million a year, a not inconsiderable sum of money. And I know that politicians, all they talk about billions and millions and all those zeros and so on. But in relative terms it means about 10 per cent of the revenues in the budget. And that is a huge amount of money, a huge amount of money.

When you think about \$800 million, for sure the government could act on their promise. And we could all act on what we want to do and that is to reduce the property tax load for

Saskatchewan people and to reduce it significantly so that property taxes here are more or less on a par with what they are in many other jurisdictions.

We could act in that way. We would add the money to make over time the kind of investment that are needed in infrastructure, whether it's economic infrastructure such as roads or whether it's social infrastructure, to do that and to do that in a meaningful and sustained way. That's what the \$800 million means to the people of Saskatchewan.

But you know what that government did when they got elected? They turned their backs on the people of Saskatchewan. They said, oh no, we just, we just made that up. We mislead you. We mislead you, the people of Saskatchewan, about giving you this \$800 million a year. No way are we going to act on that. First they said the reason we're not going to act on that because we don't like the NDP government and we don't like some of the other things they've had to say. So therefore that's a good reason for us to turn our backs on the people of Saskatchewan.

Now they have a government that — well let me put it this way — a government that has more or less a similar philosophical link and well I think for sure has a personality link because there are many members of that party opposite that are also active members of the federal Conservative Party, and there are many members of the present Conservative government in Ottawa that come from the Sask Party. In fact one of the MPs [Member of Parliament] here in Regina, Tom Lukiwski, is a former executive director for the Saskatchewan Party, so I think people of Saskatchewan get the idea that there is a very close link, a very close association — cousins if you like, brothers and sisters — there's a very close link between the federal Conservative Party and the Saskatchewan Party in government.

Now you might have thought, you might have thought that once there was a change in government . . . if that was their reason, that they didn't like the NDP, and therefore we're not going to make good on our promise because we don't like the NDP. We don't like their way of thinking. We don't like their criticisms on some aspects, so therefore we're not going to come across on equalization. We have yet to see it. We have yet to see it from them that, having had a change in government, they said no, we're prepared to come good on equalization. We still haven't seen it. So this has to go down as one of the most shameful betrayals of a province and a group of people that we have ever seen in the history of this country, Mr. Speaker.

Not only is it a shameful betrayal by the federal government, but now we have a provincial government that's saying well maybe it's not such a big deal. Maybe we should let them off the hook. Maybe we shouldn't be arguing for an improvement in equalization. Maybe we can take a bit of money here, take a bit of money there — monies that all the other provinces are also receiving, investments that other provinces are also receiving — and say well we've got that money, and we'll count it as a big win. We got more than the previous government did so it's a big win.

Well all I can say, Mr. Speaker, that it's a load of horse feathers, that this is a shameful, shameful betrayal of the people of Saskatchewan not just by the federal Conservative Party but also by the Saskatchewan Party government, Mr. Speaker. And

you know, what the Premier seems to be saying now to the people of Saskatchewan, what he seems to be saying is just roll us over and tickle our tummies, Stephen Harper. That's what he is saying to the people of Saskatchewan, and I think it's a shameful, shameful betrayal of the interests of the people of Saskatchewan.

[11:15]

And, Mr. Speaker, those are good reasons in my view to not support the budget. And having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to move an amendment to the budget, and I want to move, seconded by my colleague, the member for Saskatoon Meewasin:

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

condemn the government for stockpiling a \$1.3 billion surplus without addressing the most pressing needs of Saskatchewan people, in particular property tax relief, skills training, the environment, and the ongoing housing crisis.

I so move, Mr. Speaker, seconded by the member for Saskatoon Meewasin.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — The member from Douglas Park has moved the amendment, seconded by the member from Meewasin. It reads:

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

condemn the government for stockpiling a \$1.3 billion surplus without addressing the most pressing needs of the Saskatchewan people, in particular property tax relief, skills training, the environment, and the ongoing housing crisis.

Is the Assembly ready for the question? I recognize the member from Meewasin.

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a short aside just before I enter into the budget debate, although the Speaker has always looked youthful, the Speaker looks particularly youthful at the moment. And that said, it's my pleasure to enter into the debate on this budget.

Mr. Speaker, if backtracking was an Olympic event, we would have, on the government benches, led by the Minister of Finance, the gold medal team. And just to go briefly over some of the backtracking . . . First of all, on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, those members of the House who were here last four years, last eight years, last 12 years, last 16 years will remember the members opposite when they were in opposition commenting on the Fiscal Stabilization Fund alternatively as a slush fund and as smoke and mirrors and voodoo economics, and it shouldn't be called a fund because it's not really a fund. Upon achieving government, Mr. Speaker, the flip-flop, the backtracking is immediate. And now all the Fiscal Stabilization

Fund needs to be recognized as good, sound, sensible financial management is a new name. Somewhat like the Conservative Party of Saskatchewan itself, all it needed was a new name and then it's okay.

Secondly and related, Mr. Speaker, on deficit budgets, I don't know if in the four years that I sat on the government benches the opposition ever recognized that any, any of those budgets were in fact balanced budgets — insisted that those were deficit budgets, Mr. Speaker. Well imagine my surprise, the surprise of many when we learned that the Finance minister and the government recognizes that each of those budgets was indeed a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker. I mean, just a reversal. The gears must have just been stripped in their brains.

The last NDP government was called every day by every speaker by the Saskatchewan Party that rose to its feet to speak to that budget as an unsustainable budget. It was an unsustainable budget. The budget was unsustainable, and the senior's drug plan contained within that budget was unsustainable.

Well now that's a sustainable budget, Mr. Speaker. It's a sustainable budget. Ten per cent more is sustainable, Mr. Speaker, and the unsustainable drug plan can be added too. We can add a whole group of citizens to the drug plan if we means test senior citizens. Now means testing senior citizens isn't going to save any money. The drug plan is going to more expensive so a drug plan that was unsustainable is now sustainable. A budget that was unsustainable is now sustainable to 10 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker.

And more recently than any of those reversals, a much shorter one in time was the position taken by the Saskatchewan Party after the election, because all these positions preceded the election and were reversed after the election. But after the election, very recently, the Finance Minister in particular but the Premier as well said well here we come into government — you know after all these years of NDP financial management — and the cupboard is bare, Mr. Speaker. The situation is stark. Well they backtracked from that pretty quickly and said well okay we might be all ready this year, Mr. Speaker, but going forward, going forward we're going to have to cut back on spending.

Well they had to backtrack from that too. And now we have a budget that has new spending, and we have a budget that plans for future spending. So what happened to the evil Fiscal Stabilization Fund? Well it's okay now. What happened to those deficit budgets? Well they weren't deficit budgets. What happened to the unsustainable NDP budget? Well it wasn't unsustainable. It was just there wasn't enough money. It needed to be more spent. And what happened to the stark financial situation? Well we still can't add, Mr. Speaker, I guess is the answer on the part of the government.

One has to wonder when you look at this budget, Mr. Speaker, whether all the true fiscal conservatives are in the NDP, if there is a true fiscal conservative in the province of Saskatchewan outside of the New Democratic Party and its supporters. We have heard people, we have heard people since the budget was brought down, Mr. Speaker, defend the 10 per cent increase in government spending. And we know, we know these people

would have vilified an NDP government for an 8 per cent or a 9 per cent increase in spending. Fiscal conservatism on that side of the aisle, Mr. Speaker, is entirely partisan. It is not a matter of principle.

We have an increase in government spending that I think is actually sustainable. I think it's affordable. I think the government could have spent a little bit more on some things — maybe a little bit less on some, but certainly a little bit more on some — and could have given real tax relief to the people of the province of Saskatchewan. So I'm not one of those who would have attacked a 10 per cent increase, but I guess I'm one of those who would have been consistent upon defending it no matter who brought it in.

To complete the sort of Alice-in-the-looking-glass view of financial history that we have seen, we have the Minister of Finance looking for inspiration on budget day, not to Milton Friedman, not to Ayn Rand, not to Thomas Jefferson's quote that the government that governs best governs least. No, the Minister of Finance looked to inspiration from Anatole France, a French writer with definite socialist sympathies, Mr. Speaker.

And if the member from Wood River ever gets his house on un-American activities committee inquiries up and running, one of the first people he may want to look at is the Minister of Finance because those leftists are sneaky and subversive. And they seem to have snuck into the Minister of Finance's speech. I personally have no criticism of the Minister of Finance quoting Anatole France. I am perhaps overfond of quoting Churchill myself. But I know the member from Wood River has concerns about who is sleeping under what beds, and he may want to take a look at why the Minister of Finance would look to a socialist for inspiration on presenting his budget.

No reasonable person, Mr. Speaker, could possibly deny that this budget is built on two sturdy pillars. The fiscal responsibility, the financial responsibility of 16 NDP budgets that pulled the province of Saskatchewan back from the brink of bankruptcy — that is one of the pillars on which this budget is built.

Members opposite are very reluctant, members of government very reluctant to admit that that pillar's there. A little bit more generous . . . The Minister of Finance was, I think, a little bit more generous on admitting the other pillar, and that is the economic stewardship of the NDP government over 16 years. Its economic policies, particularly pragmatic policies on mineral royalties, prepared this province for the boom that over the last year or so we have now begun to experience.

I think if there's not an explicit recognition of that, Mr. Speaker, from the government, there's an implicit recognition of that. Those policies on royalties and taxation are being continued unaltered by the Government of Saskatchewan. They recognize how this boom was built, how this prosperity was built, what pillars it rests on. It rests on those two pillars — financial responsibility of NDP governments; the economic stewardship of NDP governments. And they don't want to undermine those pillars, and I hope they do not.

And yet we have a budget that is built upon a history now, going back to the early '90s, of fiscal responsibility. Pragmatic

economic policies left the Government of Saskatchewan with over \$1 billion in the bank. And in that circumstance remarkably, remarkably the government in its budget sorely misses the mark. And misses the mark, I think, Mr. Speaker — and I kind of understand this because I've been on treasury boards and I've been in government — misses the mark, I think, because they weren't able to focus.

And they want to throw a little bit of money here and a little bit of money there and a little bit of money there, something for everybody. And when you do a lot of something, you end up not doing much of anything. And the failure of the budget is a failure to meet priorities or set priorities even, Mr. Speaker, even to set priorities.

I think what the Minister of Finance wanted as a headline coming out of this budget debate, the budget presentation, the following debate, what he wants people talking about over the next week or so is an investment in infrastructure. I think that was kind of the highlight of what he had to say.

Now the \$600 million that the NDP had in the last budget on infrastructure has now become 1 billion, according to the Minister of Finance. We know what the inflation rate is in construction, in the trades, in materials, and in labour. I think the government is going to find that they have to run faster. And this is not a criticism; this is a fact of economic life, particularly economic life in the west part of Canada. They are going to have to run faster to stay in the same place.

But in other key areas where the government had an opportunity to do something real for people, and do something real for the economy, which is there to serve the people, Mr. Speaker, they failed.

Now the government will say yes, technically if you look at the fine print of our program, we kept our commitment on property tax. We didn't say we would double the rebate immediately. Now I think people I talked to on the doorstep in Saskatoon Meewasin in the election did not read that fine print, Mr. Speaker. And they're going to be disappointed because the rebate, the NDP rebate on property taxes was 10 per cent; the Sask Party rebate on property taxes is 2 per cent on top of that 10 per cent.

As speakers have said, well as one speaker has said, Mr. Speaker, \$27 for the average homeowner. That \$27 they'll never see, because now — not when the province was at the brink of bankruptcy as it was in the early '90s and revenue sharing had to take a back seat — now when the government has a billion and a half dollars in the bank, now there is no revenue sharing increases.

Now the mayors are saying — I'm not saying, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying; the mayor of my city is saying — we're going to have to increase property taxes because of this budget. And we're going to increase them in Saskatoon by more than \$27, Mr. Speaker. People are going to be going backwards on this because the members opposite, the government, chose to rely on the technicalities of their program, not deliver . . . 120, \$150 million, Mr. Speaker, they could have delivered the whole promise now. They had the money to do it. They don't want to do it because this is not an election year. That's the only reason

people are going to see a property tax increase this year as a result of this budget.

[11:30]

They will not forget. They will not forget that they expected relief, particularly the many people . . . Almost as many people voted for the Sask Party in my constituency as voted for me, Mr. Speaker. I commented about that when I was responding to the Throne Speech. I won't pretend otherwise. Those people expected real relief on their property taxes as a result of what was said yesterday, and they're not getting it. They're getting an increased bill.

Yes there is a boom. There is a boom that has been built by sound management of this province over more than a decade. The boom creates issues which the government is not prepared to address. The major issue this government is not prepared to address is housing. And a major symptom of their failure is their inability on their issue, Mr. Speaker — I think people might agree politically, this was their issue — on their issue to come to people with a real benefit, a real benefit that would be felt by families. There is no such benefit in this budget. A real benefit that would have been felt by families by fully fulfilling their commitment on property tax.

Now I think that maybe the only amusing columnist in *The StarPhoenix* is Cam Fuller. Mr. Fuller in a column not directly about the cost of housing made this comment, that if you own a home in Saskatchewan, you are now rich on paper; you are so rich, he says, you can't afford to move. Because it's paper wealth, Mr. Speaker, but we're being taxed on it. And the property taxes, if the members opposite thought were onerous and unfair, well what do they think as the value of people's homes rise and the cost of property taxes rise and they make no, no passing wave. We've technically fulfilled a promise; we're done for the year and you can just pay the higher taxes. I think it's a betrayal of people who gave them their confidence, Mr. Speaker. I believe that it is.

Doug Elliott says that Saskatchewan will overtake Alberta in the inflation rate this year or next year. And why? Because of housing.

We have people who are in homes, and maybe they're the lucky ones, Mr. Speaker. They already own their homes. They've already gone into the market. They're going to see their property taxes going up. And it would be going up as a result of this budget, Mr. Speaker. And the relief, the net relief, is just not there. Twenty-seven dollars a year is not going to cover the increases that the mayors are talking about having to make because of the betrayal of this government on revenue sharing.

The people who aren't in the market, who don't own their first homes yet, are watching as homes recede into the distance. Their first home disappearing, Mr. Speaker, into the distance of time, maybe hoping that they might inherit a home some day. You don't want young people hoping that they're going to inherit their parents' home as their first home. A member says, especially if you're the parent.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are people who really don't dream of owning a home and did not before the boom, Mr. Speaker, who

are required to rent. And in a market where rental supply, in my city, Mr. Speaker, is I believe at zero or so close to zero that it might as well be zero. And if it's not zero yet, it will be soon.

And the crisis in housing was recognized by many last summer. And to give him credit, there was one person, not in the NDP caucus, there was one person in the Saskatchewan caucus who joined the NDP caucus in recognizing that housing was a crisis. And that was Mr. Ted Merriman, who said at the end of July, there's a crisis in housing and we can't wait. And the government agreed with him.

The government had already made a multi-million dollar investment in social housing and proceeded to take other steps. But what met Mr. Merriman's warning from members of his party and members of his caucus? Silence. And in a notable display of party discipline, Mr. Merriman fell silent too.

And in this budget, where now the Saskatchewan Party recognizes that there's a problem with affordability . . . And the Minister of Social Services says and availability, but it's the same thing, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance can quote Anatole France all he wants. I know he knows the law of supply and demand that when you cut supply and you increase demand, the price goes up, and that is what is happening with rental housing throughout this province. In Saskatoon it is the prime example of that perhaps, Mr. Speaker.

And while this crisis has been happening, the only response from that government, which as a party refused to speak to it in their platform, was a suggestion from the leader of the opposition at the time, the now Premier, that he would remove the power from the cities to control the disappearing rental accommodations into condo conversions. That was their only position taken during the election was that they would remove the power of the cities to put brakes on the disappearing rental supply.

Now the Minister of Social Services this week finally recognizes — long after last July, long after last August when the member from Saskatoon Eastview and the member from Regina Dewdney and I were speaking to this matter — long after that, this week the Minister of Social Services recognizes that this requires some study and appoints Mr. Merriman and Mr. Pringle to the study.

But to return to the budget, Mr. Speaker — and I know you are waiting for me to come back, to return to the budget specifically — what is put in this budget to fund the recommendations of this study? The people of Saskatchewan, people living particularly in rental accommodations where the rent keeps going up or they're being evicted so that the rental accommodation can become something else, the people who are at risk of losing their homes are waiting for a study. And this budget has no funds set aside for whatever recommendations Mr. Merriman and Mr. Pringle might make.

They might make very good recommendations. They might even make them soon. I don't know, but a sceptic might wonder, maybe a more sceptical person than me might think that the government wants to pretend to be concerned about this issue while they're hoping it goes away. A sceptic might think that, but this issue is not going to go away, Mr. Speaker,

whatever the motivation of the government to have hid their head in the sand as a party until this week and then responded with a study.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to both people and the economy that is there to serve them — not on the issue of housing, but again on the issue of the problems with the boom. We have prosperity in the province of Saskatchewan which this government had an opportunity to share with families. And in a very direct way, they had the means — they had the resources; they just didn't have the will — to bring in a further 10 per cent Sask Party rebate on property taxes to match the NDP 10 per cent rebate on property taxes. They could have done that. They didn't do that.

They could have actually done something real about housing for those facing homelessness, Mr. Speaker, but they didn't do that.

The other issue that they have been slow, slow to come to, Mr. Speaker, is appreciation of the issues around the labour shortage. Now I was in here during the previous session of the legislature, Mr. Speaker, and it was remarkable how long the Saskatchewan Party talked . . . it was remarkably how long into that session the Saskatchewan Party talked about unemployment in the province. Long after, I think, everybody else had realized that there wasn't a problem with unemployment in the province, long after everybody realized it wasn't a problem with having more people than jobs, long after everybody realized that the problem was we had more jobs than people, finally the Saskatchewan Party figured it out, and they changed their rhetoric. But that's all they've done, Mr. Speaker, is changed their rhetoric.

In the last year of the NDP government, 2,000 new training spaces was created. Was that enough? Maybe not, Mr. Speaker. We did the best we could. I'm sure the Sask Party when they were in opposition said that's not enough.

So what's their response? Now when they're in government, when they have a chance to set priorities, when training people is relatively inexpensive compared to some of the projects they've taken on and should take on, Mr. Speaker, what is their response now when it's their turn? Well to halve the target; to drop from 2,000 to 1,100 training spaces. This is what the Saskatchewan Party in their budget calls preparing for growth. So, Mr. Speaker, here we have a budget that could have provided real relief to people, that could have done something about the twin crises — if I may call them that — of a booming economy, to make sure that that booming economy benefits every citizen in Saskatchewan, that is housing and skills training.

Here's a budget that fails to do those fundamental things. Here's a budget that misses the mark. It's a budget that I cannot support. I will want to speak to this matter more, Mr. Speaker, but for the time being for today, I adjourn debate.

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

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

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

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I make a motion to adjourn the House, I would just like to wish everyone a very restful long weekend. Hopefully you have time to spend . . . Mr. Speaker, may I have leave to make a statement?

The Speaker: — The Deputy House Leader has asked for leave to make a statement. Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I just want to wish everyone a very restful Easter weekend and holiday. May you all enjoy time with your families. And with that I move that this House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: — The member has moved that this House adjourn. Before I place the question, I would also like to extend Easter greetings and wishes to all of the members, trust that this will be a restful, meaningful time with family and friends.

The member has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried. This Assembly stands adjourned until Monday, March 31 at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:44.]

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