



FIRST SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

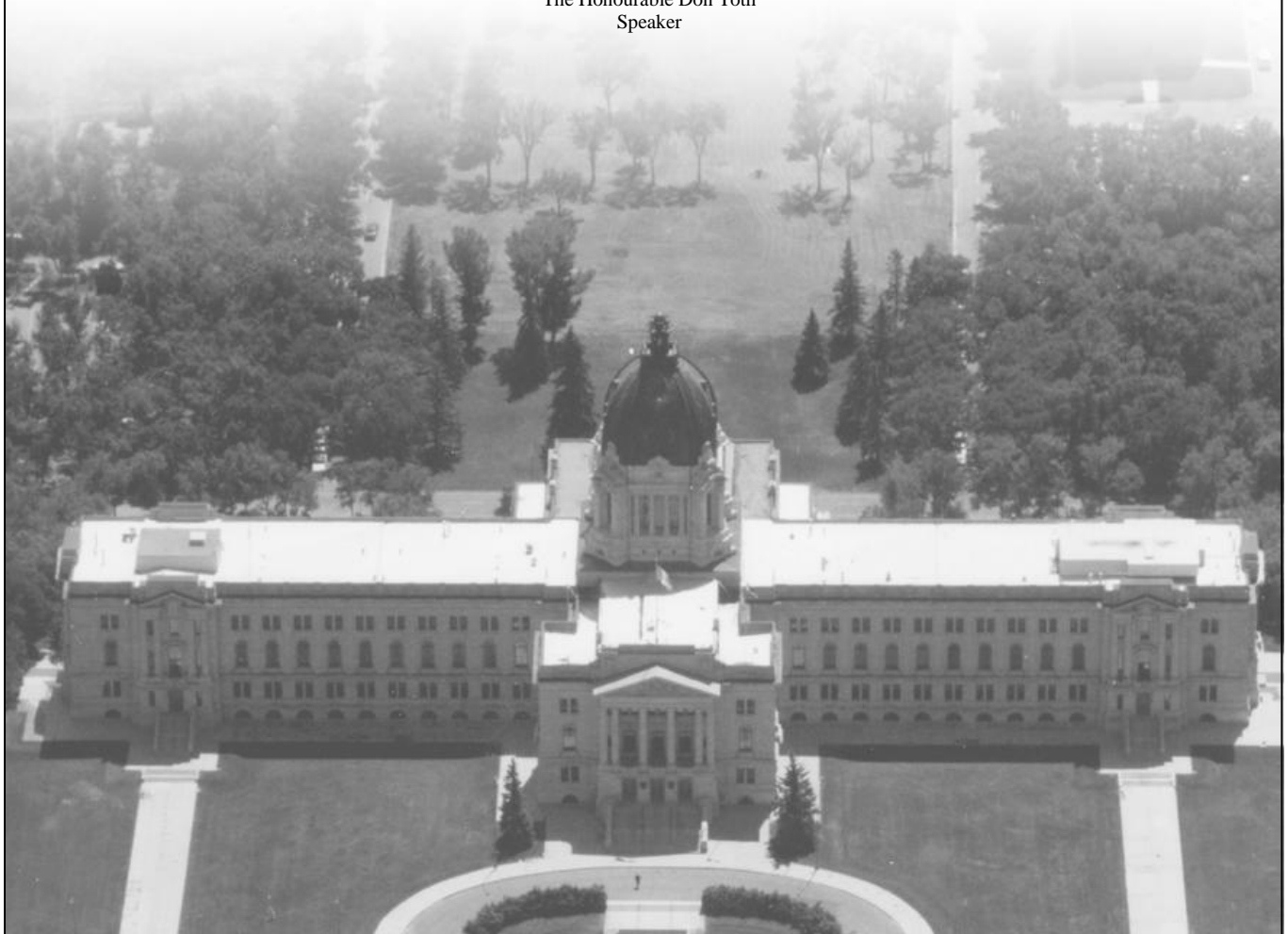
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

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Wilson, Nadine	SP	Saskatchewan Rivers
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Yates, Kevin	NDP	Regina Dewdney
Vacant		Cumberland

[The Assembly resumed at 19:00.]

EVENING SITTING

SPECIAL ORDER

ADJOURNED DEBATES

**MOTION FOR APPROVAL OF BUDGETARY POLICY
(BUDGET DEBATE)**

[The Assembly resumed the adjourned debate on the proposed motion by the Hon. Mr. Gantfoer that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Van Mulligen.]

The Speaker: — Order please. Debate will continue on the budget speech. I recognize the member from Kindersley.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before the break we were talking a little bit about the budget and the potential very, very good news story that it's been for the province of Saskatchewan. The amount of investment that there is in Saskatchewan, the opportunities that there has been for people all across the province are certainly very positive in terms of job creation, very positive in terms of investment, very positive in terms of people moving back to our province.

And having the opportunity to speak to people outside of the province a few occasions, I'm always amazed when you see young people coming up to you and saying they're from Biggar, Saskatchewan or they're from Rocanville or they're from Estevan or they're from Weyburn. And they're saying that there's opportunities back in Saskatchewan, and they want to explore those opportunities, and they're starting to move back in increasing numbers. So it's great news for the province of Saskatchewan to say the least.

I was talking a little bit before the break about agriculture and the positive news stories that there are surrounding agriculture. In 35 years of farming in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, we've never seen prices even approaching the kind of returns that we're seeing in agriculture. There's an incredible optimism in the province in terms of agriculture. Certainly on the cattle side and on the hog side, there's some problems, and we all understand that. The Minister of Agriculture has taken some steps to deal with that.

On the grains and oilseeds side though, you'll never see the kind of optimism that there is in the province right now. Families are looking through to transition their farms to younger generations, again some things that we've never seen. We're seeing land values increase in some cases at fairly rapid rates across Saskatchewan, which is indeed a good news story for the province as well.

So I think, to listen to the member from Coronation Park hark back to the days of land bank, I think that's a dark era that there are very few people in Saskatchewan ever want to return to in terms of agriculture policy in this province. It was an era when the government felt that they had to step in and buy up farm

land from people across this province. We still see that legacy out there, where there's land bank land. This is a government that is looking at making some changes with respect to that, and I have to think that that's something that would be a very positive development. I don't think the government should be in business in terms of these kinds of things. We've signalled to the private sector across this country that that's not going to be a part of a Saskatchewan Party government, and as a result of that what we are seeing, Mr. Speaker, is really quite interesting.

Now what we are seeing is industry and private sector involvement stepping up into Saskatchewan and saying that for the first time now they realize what the rules are, that the government doesn't want a piece of the action of everything that happens in Saskatchewan any longer. And as a result of that, they're looking at opportunities they'd never looked at before — hundreds of millions of dollars of investment that we will see in Saskatchewan in the oil and gas sector that we wouldn't have been seeing otherwise.

We were seeing a tremendous amount of activity in the potash sector in Saskatchewan, in uranium. The potash companies are stepping up like they've never stepped up before in Saskatchewan. The fact that we are repealing the potash expropriation Bill was seen as an extremely positive development for potash companies in Saskatchewan. Another thing where people across . . . potash companies are saying this was an error that we should never be involved in again, investments of hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money into an already existing industry in Saskatchewan simply based on a philosophy that has failed the province of Saskatchewan for 75 years. Mr. Speaker, a failed administration, a failed premier, and a failed philosophy that the people of Saskatchewan I daresay never want to return to, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — And I think that — as a result of that, that optimism that we see across Saskatchewan, young people looking at opportunities in Saskatchewan on an unprecedented fashion — is great news for this province to say the least. And we're seeing that in all kinds of areas across Saskatchewan.

In the ministry that I represent, Mr. Speaker, we're doing a number of things to try and foster that development even more positively. We've put additional resources into the registry in terms of regulation and in terms of speeding up permitting times for oil and gas developments and potash developments, uranium developments — all of those kinds of things — to provide a speedy opportunity for people to get into business here in Saskatchewan. That does not mean though that things like the environment won't be respected because it most certainly will be respected, Mr. Speaker.

We're looking at, in the northwest of our province, an oil sands development that is a tremendous opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan. I had the good fortune, along with the member from Meadow Lake, of touring the facility up there. And I daresay that in terms of that, the footprint, the environmental footprint that it will make in the future up there, it'll be very little more than a normal horizontal drilling opportunity in

Saskatchewan. I would invite members of the opposition to join with us at some point and tour that facility before you start talking about, as your national leader is talking about, moratoriums on development in the oil sands of Alberta or Saskatchewan.

It's a tremendously different story that is happening and unfolding in Saskatchewan than it is in other provinces. This is not going to be a strip mining operation. This is going to be in situ. It'll be horizontal drilling, probably steam assisted. That has yet to be determined. The water source that will be used for that steam will not be draining a river or will not be draining a lake or anything of that nature. It's a groundwater source. It's saline in nature, so it's useless in any other application.

So what we are seeing there is a very, very responsible development going forward right down to the fact when you tour their camps, Mr. Speaker, it was amazing to see the level of concern that they have about environmental problems or environmental concerns.

If you are, for example, working in the shop in the facility that they have up there, the mechanic's shop there, every time that a litre of oil is used, the mechanic or whomever is using it signs that litre of oil out. I can't imagine that level of accountability in many operations, but that's the level of accountability that is there. Walking down the walkways throughout the camp operation, you see those — I'm not even sure what they're called, Mr. Speaker — little stations where people can put out cigarettes. They're all over the place in the camp. They hire students to come in in the summertime and pick up scraps of paper off the ground if there happen to be any . . . or a bottle cap or anything of that nature.

This is an extremely responsible company that has the interests of the environment at heart, to say the least, and it will be a tremendous development for Saskatchewan, about a billion and a half barrels of oil that are identified at this point. I think it's going to quickly grow to about 6 billion barrels here very soon, and it may go beyond that in the near, near future.

It will mean, it will mean hundreds of millions and in fact billions of dollars of royalties to the province of Saskatchewan. And in turn what those royalties will be used for will be not for buying up potato companies or dot-coms or telecoms in Argentina or wherever else the socialists operate, that they are interested in those kinds of things. What it will be used for is for things like the priorities of this government in the budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Infrastructure, it'll be used for hospitals. It'll be used for schools. It'll be used for highways. It'll be used for the things that are the priorities of this government that have been identified in Saskatchewan. It'll be investments in people in Saskatchewan. It'll be investments in social services. It'll be investments in terms of education. It'll be investments in the young people of this province on a par that we have never seen before. And I dare say that the young people across Saskatchewan are going to look at this budget in a number of years into the future, and they are going to say that this is a government that had its priorities right . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — This is a government that had the interests of Saskatchewan at heart. This is a government that clearly has set a new path for this province, different, far different than the NDP [New Democratic Party] former administration here in Saskatchewan. And it's the reason why, Mr. Speaker, that on November 7 those people opposite are sitting right where they are.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — And I suspect in another half-a-dozen years they will realize how wrong they were in Saskatchewan, just as the people of the province have to date, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think that that probably concludes the remarks that I want to make this evening, but to say, to say, Mr. Speaker, I will not be supporting the amendment, but I'll be wholeheartedly supporting the budget that's presented by my colleague, the member from Melfort. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour and a privilege for me to rise in this House and take part in this debate on behalf of the fine folks of Regina Northeast. They've been so kind to return me to this House on a couple or three occasions now, and I've appreciated their trust, and I will do my best to live up to it.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, although built on an NDP template, has come up short, has come up short in a number of areas — a number of areas, Mr. Speaker — that affect real people, mainstream people, the ordinary people, the ordinary working people of our province, the kind of people who live in Regina Northeast.

Mr. Speaker, it should be the fundamental principle of any government to govern in the best interests of all the people of Saskatchewan, all the people of the province, not just in the best interests of the friends and the supporters of the government. Well, Mr. Speaker, if that was the measuring stick used to measure this budget, this budget would come up short.

While this government sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money, Mr. Speaker, the closer we look at this budget, the more we spot the shortcomings. First and the most obvious is the lack of real property tax relief. When that party was in opposition, they repeatedly called for a program that would remove the education portion of the property tax on the backs of homeowners. When in opposition the Sask Party said, on many occasions, that the property tax burden was hitting our seniors . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Order. Order. I'd ask the members to allow the member from Regina Northeast to present his remarks to the Assembly. There will be ample time for other members. We have a long evening ahead of us, so if you want to participate just wait your time. It will come.

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When in opposition, the Sask Party said on many occasions that the property tax burden was hitting our seniors and those on fixed income very hard. When in opposition, the Sask Party said on many occasions that the property tax burden was a hindrance to business and the economic development of our province. They said that it was holding back investments and job creation. When in opposition, the Sask Party said on many occasions that if they were the government, they would immediately bring forward meaningful property tax relief. Then during last fall's election campaign they asked — the Saskatchewan Party on many occasions asked — for support from the voters for their pledge for meaningful property tax relief if they formed the government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they formed government. And today the Sask Party's meaningful property tax relief is worth a measly \$22 per family — \$22 per family, Mr. Speaker, while this government over there sits on, sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

Mr. Speaker, it was reported in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* on March 20, 2008, and I quote that:

The Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce gave the provincial government an overall C grade on the budget, calling it a disappointment when Saskatchewan has A-grade potential. The chamber was hoping for a significant change to the education property tax policy . . .

[19:15]

All of this, Mr. Speaker, all this while the government over there sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

Mr. Speaker, the budget disappointments continues. As reported on March 20, 2008, issue of the Regina *Leader-Post*, and I quote, “The minimal new property tax relief, the seven per cent increase to municipal revenue sharing and the portion of infrastructure spending earmarked for municipalities . . . added up to disappointment . . .” And that's according to SUMA's [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] president, Allan Earle.

Mr. Speaker, in the same issue of the *Leader-Post* carrying the comments of the Regina mayor, Pat Fiacco, on how this provincial budget affected the city of Regina, and I quote:

“At the end of the day, we look at the provincial budget to see how it is going to offset our budget in regards to our own increases that are needed. [And] I can tell the citizens of Regina there will definitely be a property tax increase this year” . . .

Mr. Speaker, in the March 20, 2008, Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* it was reported, as it reports on the provincial budget comments, of the Saskatoon mayor. And I quote:

“The province was saying that [it was] . . . going to put in seven per cent . . . in revenue sharing, and in fact it is seven per cent for . . . cities — so that's about \$1.2 to \$1.4 million. What we've been asking for, though, is approximately \$5 million from the province. So we're short

about \$4 million at this time” . . .

All of this, Mr. Speaker, all of this while that government over there sits on a pile, a \$1.3 billion pile of money.

Mr. Speaker, the members on the other side from Saskatoon and from Regina have certainly failed to represent their cities and their constituents in that Sask Party government's budgeting process. Mr. Speaker, shame on them, shame on them for not standing up for the needs of this province's cities.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the hard work of the NDP and the fiscal discipline of the NDP, this government was able to increase funding for infrastructure. And I'm glad to see that this government is carrying on in the same direction that the NDP were going when we were the government previously.

Mr. Speaker, immediately it raises a question in my mind why this government has failed to take advantage of a federal program called Building Canada. On November 6, 2007, the Government of Canada unveiled details of its historic \$33 billion infrastructure plan, called Building Canada. It's \$33 billion to be shared by the provinces over seven years for the infrastructure, \$33 billion to be shared by the provinces of Canada over the next seven years to support the revitalization and the building of new infrastructure.

Other provinces have already moved forward on this. Other provinces have already taken advantage of this. British Columbia for example on — I believe it was — November 7 signed on to the framework agreement with the federal government to the tune of \$2.2 billion. This money they're going to use to invest in roads and bridges and tunnels and ports and public transit. And the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. They are taking advantage of the federal program. This government has failed to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it was December 7, 2007, the Government of New Brunswick signed a framework agreement with the federal government for nearly \$1 billion to support the infrastructure in their province, including water and sewer and waste water projects in a number of the communities throughout New Brunswick. Nova Scotia has signed on. Nova Scotia signed on, on November 9, 2007, for funding for their highway infrastructure improvements, water and sewer improvements, and bridge and other transportation improvements throughout the province of Nova Scotia. In fact, Mr. Speaker, even Newfoundland and Labrador have signed on, most recently have signed on for several billions of dollars to support their infrastructure systems primarily in their highways and road building, upgrading the access roads and highways throughout both Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, here is a program that's been there. It's federal dollars. It doesn't encumber the Saskatchewan taxpayer at all. It's federal dollars sitting there — a program that this government could be taking advantage of. They failed to do so. I can't help but wonder, Mr. Speaker, if part of the reason that they haven't been able to sign the framework agreement on the Building Canada program is that they want to use that money, which they will eventually get I'm sure, but they want to use that money to disguise their shortcomings on . . .

The Speaker: — Order. Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. McMillan: — To request leave to introduce guests.

The Speaker: — Is leave granted?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — The member from Lloydminster may proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you. Mr. Speaker, through you and to you I'd like to introduce a person in our midst today who is well known to everyone here especially the Speaker. It is my predecessor, Milt Wakefield, who for eight years dutifully served the people of Lloydminster and I'm glad to see him here today. So please join me in welcoming Milt Wakefield.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Thank you and I recognize the member from Regina Northeast.

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

Mr. Harper: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to join with the member opposite in welcoming Mr. Wakefield back to this Assembly where he has served in the past with great distinction and welcome, Milt. It's nice to see you again. You're looking as young and as bright as ever.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, I question the strategy that the government over there is using in its failure to take advantage of the federal program Building Canada. It's obvious to me that other provinces have seen the opportunity to use federal dollars to support their infrastructure improvements and lessening the financial burden on their taxpayers, but this government hasn't moved in that direction and I wonder why. I wonder perhaps if they are going to eventually get access to those federal dollars for Building Canada, those federal infrastructure dollars, but they're going to try to use that to disguise and cover up as a bit of a smoke screen to their failure to getting a fair share, the fair deal on equalization with the federal government. Or perhaps even one could consider a sell-off to the federal government. I suspect that, Mr. Speaker, that you will see the infrastructure money coming into Saskatchewan under this program, but they're going to try to disguise it, disguise it as equalization money. It's two different things. They're oranges and they're apples. They're two different things.

Mr. Speaker, when we look through this budget we note that the — and I take a little special interest in the note of the money being spent in this budget on highways and infrastructure — and we note that there is an increase of some \$67 million this year over last. Well initially you would say that's a lot of money. It is. But if you look at the whole scheme of things that last year the budget was something like 446 million, this year it's 513. If you look at the fact that increased costs are factored in, you really don't see many more projects.

In fact we have been led to believe that as a result of this year's budget for highways and infrastructure, we will end up in Saskatchewan with less than 30 kilometres more pavement than was done last year. Despite the hoopla, despite the presentation by the Minister of Finance that this was an infrastructure-focused budget, it is really, really nothing more than what was done last year, minus some twenty-seven and a half kilometres more pavement. That's the only difference.

Mr. Speaker, 30 kilometres more of highway, despite all the money that's being spent, 30 kilometres more highway. And all of this, Mr. Speaker, all of this, while that government over there sits on a pile of . . . \$1.3 billion mountain of money. My concern here, Mr. Speaker, is that it is fine to increase infrastructure projects. It's fine to increase the funding for them, but only if the industry has the capacity to meet those increases.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the good management of our province and the provincial economy by the NDP government in the past, this province is enjoying the biggest boom it has enjoyed in its history. With our industries working at capacity, there is a huge need for skilled workers.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to talk to the business manager for the Iron Workers Local 771 here in Regina this morning, and he is telling me that he is short of workers. He has all of his members working. He has put a plea out to other locals for workers because he has more work than he has workers to fill the jobs. So, Mr. Speaker, in times like this — times like this — there is a real need, a real need to have skilled workers to meet the cry of our economy for that work-related support.

Last year the NDP government expanded training seats by 2,000 opportunities. Nothing less than the same was needed this year if we are serious about maintaining our growing economy. Well what did this government do, Mr. Speaker? This budget commits to only 1,100 new training opportunities. If this government is truly committed to growing our province, then it will add more training opportunities immediately. All of this, Mr. Speaker — all of this — while that government sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

Mr. Speaker, the danger in increasing funding for infrastructure projects when the industry does not have the capacity to meet those increases is that you do not complete any more projects. You simply complete more expensive projects. Mr. Speaker, as I have said earlier, Saskatchewan is enjoying the biggest boom our province has ever seen.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Harper: — And this is good. This is good. Boom times,

prosperous times is good. But there is a dark side to the boom times, Mr. Speaker. There is a dark side. Today in Saskatchewan many people cannot find or finding it difficult to find quality, affordable housing. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget does nothing to meet the needs of those Saskatchewan citizen. Nothing. All of this, Mr. Speaker, all of this while that government sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

What is this government's position on affordable housing issues, Mr. Speaker? Well they're going to study it. They're going to study it. Mr. Speaker, I say to the government opposite, what's to study? What's to study? There is not the affordable housing to meet the needs. Now is not the time to study. Now is a time for action. Mr. Speaker, the first responsibility of any government should be to make the lives of all those people it governs better.

Mr. Speaker, it was reported in the *Leader-Post* on March 20, 2008, Peter Gilmer of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry said, and I quote:

“What we're really not seeing in this budget, given a . . . [real] good financial position for the province, is a significant commitment to the social agenda.”

[19:30]

All of this, Mr. Speaker, all of this while that government over there sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

Mr. Speaker, this government, through this budget, has let down the people of Saskatchewan on several fronts. They have let down the property owner by not living up to their commitment of providing meaningful property tax relief. They have let down the working men and women of this province by launching an attack on the rights of mainstream working people of our province.

They have turned their backs on those in the greatest needs in our province by their refusal to deal with the affordable housing issues and other negative effects of a booming economy. They have let down all the people in Saskatchewan by taking a lead from their federal cousins, Stephen Harper Conservative government in Ottawa, in only paying lip service to the greatest issue facing our province, our country, our world, and mankind as we know it, and that is the global warming issue.

Mr. Speaker, there is no meaningful commitment to a timetable for this Sask Party government to meet its climate change targets. All of this, Mr. Speaker, all of this while that government sits on a \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

An Hon. Member: — How much was that, Ron? How much was that?

Mr. Harper: — A \$1.3 billion mountain of money.

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined just a few, just a few of the reasons the majority of people in Regina Northeast have instructed me to vote for the amendment and against the budget motion. And, Mr. Speaker, I will be proud to do so. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, can you hear me? Okay, all right. It brings me great pleasure to rise . . . Can you hear me?

Some Hon. Members: — Yes.

Ms. Wilson: — All right. To rise in the House and to speak about the 2008-2009 budget of this new government.

Mr. Speaker, leadership is about responsibility and decisive action. Leadership also stands for understanding, accountability, and empathy for people's needs and priorities. These are priorities like health care, education, and highways. And I believe all of this is addressed in our government's first budget.

Saskatchewan's economy is thriving, and it's because of our government. Is anybody listening? Yes. Our new government will benefit the people of Saskatchewan by providing a health care system for all patients, schools to accommodate all children, and safe roads for all people. We have a duty to manage the money wisely, and we also have a duty to deliver our promises.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to announce to my constituents of Saskatchewan Rivers that this budget looks to the future. We'll move Saskatchewan forward. A budget that gets Saskatchewan ready for growth and a budget that will build the province — this budget has the largest capital investment in the history of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, on November 7 the people of Saskatchewan elected a new government and sent a clear signal that they wanted change. They wanted new leadership and a move in a new direction. They voted for a new era of hope and opportunity. Our new government wants to deliver with a 1 billion ready-for-growth initiative which includes providing a much-needed education property tax relief to the farmers and cottage owners in Saskatchewan.

In Saskatchewan Rivers constituency, we have beautiful lakes and sceneries with wonderful hard-working people living by them. But many are struggling with the high education property taxes and were contemplating selling. I'm pleased to announce that this budget offers property tax rebates for home owners as this increase from 10 to 12 per cent will offer relief. The property tax rebate on farm land will have an annual tax savings of over \$2,000 for each individual farmer.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan Rivers constituency has many fine, first-rate parks that need their facilities upgraded. Our new government budget has provided a \$5 million increase to Saskatchewan parks which will improve operations and increase tourism.

The budget also provides an 8 million increase to double funding for tourism and improved highway signage. Many of

our Saskatchewan Rivers local lake businesses at Candle, Christopher, Big River and Tobin lakes rely on these marketing tools to grow. All Saskatchewan business owners will see benefits from this budget by increased funding thus enhancing our parks and attracting more events and people to our province.

A source of irritant around our local lake communities was the unpopular campground permit fee, commonly known as the wiener roast tax, which has now been eliminated. The \$3 per day firewood fee will save park goers about \$375,000 annually, thus benefiting both park goers and our regional and provincial parks.

Mr. Speaker, our government promised to promote the history and culture of our province. Through this budget our government is providing \$700,000 to create a Capital City Commission. Tourism will thrive by our new government working to ensure that Saskatchewan is ready for growth.

Mr. Speaker, our province's transportation system is vital in sustaining the province's economic momentum. Saskatchewan Rivers constituency will greatly benefit from the TMS [thin membrane surface] upgrades and primary weight road strategy. The transportation system puts public safety and efficiency as a priority.

One of the highlights of the budget for highways and infrastructure in Saskatchewan Rivers constituency includes 11.3 million to complete work on the Cyr Road near Morin Lake Park in Big River.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Improvements to Highway No. 55 on the east side of the constituency is also included in the budget. The winter maintenance program is a strategic component to economic regions in the province.

Saskatchewan Rivers constituency experiences unexpected variability of weather and above average snowfall on our northern highways. Our government implemented the night rider program to patrol highway regions scouting out tough travel conditions, and it has proved very successful in improving safety and travel conditions.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring that everyone benefits in the new West commenced when our government announced elimination of provincial sales tax on used light vehicles. Our strengthening economy provides the opportunity for tax reduction and helps many of the residents in Saskatchewan Rivers constituency. And I do believe Saskatchewan is ready for growth.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to state that Saskatchewan Rivers constituency is home to the Shore Gold Star Diamond project, an exploration site in the Fort a La Corne area. I recently toured this site and was impressed by its extensive kimberlite field, one of the largest in the world. Our government is reinstating the 10 per cent Saskatchewan mineral exploration tax credit for flow-through share agreements. The Saskatchewan tax credit will once again parallel the federal

credit for investments made by Saskatchewan taxpayers in support of the Saskatchewan mineral exploration activity.

Mr. Speaker, our budget has strengthened the partnership with First Nations. The 2008 budget provides a 200,000 increase for total funding of \$470,000 to support the First Nations institute in developing a management program to ensure that quality child welfare services are delivered. The budget will increase the involvement of First Nations and native peoples in Saskatchewan's economy and communities, as well as funding economic, social, and quality of life programming.

Among the constituencies, Saskatchewan Rivers has four First Nations communities that will benefit from the funding. This will help their economic, social, and quality of life programming. The communities of Big River, Little Red, Sturgeon Lake, and Wahpeton First Nations have a very young population. Consultations with them have indicated their communities have a very rapid growth. Their leaders are addressing First Nation needs and the role the native peoples will play in the province's economic momentum.

Mr. Speaker, highlights for First Nations people include 50.9 million for gaming agreements, 11.3 million to improve First Nations access roads to northern reserves through highways and infrastructure, and 3 million for First Nations consultation, including support for mapping of traditional territories. Our government has promised a commitment of hosting a round table on Aboriginal consultation, as well as \$125,000 to honour and support the bilateral protocol with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Speaker, the 2008 budget provides 20.7 million for nurse recruitment and retention, as well as a 60 million partnership with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, with 120 more nursing training seats. We're all very proud of our government's quick action on recruiting 300 nurses from the Philippines . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — To immediately alleviate the nursing shortage. The budget is providing 6.1 million for more physician training seats, recruitment, and retention. We're also providing a \$6 million increase for new prescription drugs. The government is also committed to develop a seniors' health care strategy and providing \$250,000 to conduct patient exit surveys.

Rural health facilities and senior centres play a very important role and function in the communities of Saskatchewan Rivers constituency. This constituency houses senior centres in Big River, Debden, Christopher Lake, and Smeaton; and they're all very important to us.

Mr. Speaker, the budget provides a huge support for school capital projects in Saskatchewan. Communities in the province will receive record funding of 117 million for kindergarten to grade 12 school capital projects, as part as a ready-for-growth initiative. This year's budget will also include a 3 million increase for intensive support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, recognizing the increased number of

students requiring specialized supports. I joined the Adopt an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] program and was very honoured to be included into a wonderful family who had a child with autism. Both parties continue to benefit from this ongoing, positive learning experience. And if he's watching, I'd like to say hello to him. Hi Ryan.

Mr. Speaker, research has indicated that investment in the early years fosters literacy, and we need to ensure all our students succeed in school to benefit from the growing economy as well as our province benefiting from their achievements.

As well, Mr. Speaker, on the weekend I had the opportunity to attend a baby shower, one of our province's prairie customs. And the grandparents who are constituents and friends of mine, Doug and Karen Sarabin, were very happy to receive their first grandchild here in Saskatchewan. Juliana Brown is her name. And they are very happy to have their grandchild and their children all living in Saskatchewan due to the fact of our government. And what a great time to live in the new West, in Saskatchewan, a province ready for growth.

[19:45]

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I will not be supporting the amendment. However I would like to thank my colleagues for their hard work and contributions to the budget which I support. I would proudly like to second the Saskatchewan provincial budget for the 2008 and 2009 years. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, it's a delight for me to be able to stand to my feet in the House tonight and address the budget, the first budget by the new Saskatchewan Party government. It's a pleasure to be able to say that not only has the ministry of Highways and Transportation been benefactor from a large increase in resources, but we're actually going to see some work done on the roads this year.

Mr. Speaker, this is the occasion where I have to say that . . . I want to say actually my thanks to the constituents of Cypress Hills. This is the first opportunity I've had to speak in the House since the election last fall, and there has been a lot of water under the bridge in the intervening short four or five months. But nevertheless I want to express my gratitude to the people of Cypress Hills because in large numbers they saw how important it was for this province to have a new government, and it was reflected in the polling results where we were able to achieve about 76 per cent of the voter turnout.

And that's very significant. That's a very clear mandate from the people of Cypress Hills to move this province forward, to stop looking in the rear-view mirror, to stop looking at our history, but look to the future, look what our potential might be, develop a vision for the province, and move to fulfill that vision. And I believe that the people of Cypress Hills are quite

excited about the direction that the new government is taking already in its very short mandate to date.

I just can't say enough, Mr. Speaker, about how much I appreciated the opportunity to go door to door in my constituency during the election campaign. And I want to speak in particular about the experiences I had in the north part of the constituency, the communities that are situated along Highway 32, the notorious Highway 32, the highway that spawned the nude pothole calendar Highway 32 — that's the one.

Mr. Speaker, I knocked on almost every door in the communities of Cree Lake, Cabri, Abbey. I guess I missed a few there because it was getting pretty late at night. I was also in the area of Lancer. We knocked on every door in Sceptre. I knocked on many doors in the community of Leader. And without exception, and I can hardly imagine how conformed the view was on this particular issue, but without exception, if I asked the people at the door what the number one issue was for them personally and their communities, it was the condition of Highway 32.

You know, the consensus around that issue and how negative the condition of that highway was in terms of their own psychology, in terms of the way they viewed themselves and their communities, in terms of the way they viewed the impact this highway was having on their potential was so specific, so concrete, that I was really moved to say at a couple of points, if I ever get an opportunity to do something about that highway, I will make it my priority.

And, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here tonight, as the Minister of Highways and Transportation and Infrastructure, to say that we've delivered on that for the people of those communities. We have put a three-year plan in place to completely rebuild Highway 32 from the community of Shackleton right through to Cree Lake.

Not only that, we're going to do some paving around the community of Cabri. And in year 2 of our rollout that we undertook just a couple of days ago, we're going to do some paving from the junction with No. 1 right up to the community of Success. So large stretches of Highway 32 will be either completely rebuilt or repaved. And I think that we're going to see a blossoming of those communities, the economy that those communities will generate as a result of this new highway.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say that that highway will be built to a primary weight standard which is something that is absolutely crucial to the success of these many small rural communities. They've been handcuffed for far too long by inadequate infrastructure, crumbling roads. And when they did have a highway, it often wasn't a primary weight highway, and we're addressing that issue in terms of Highway 32.

Mr. Speaker, another highway that we decided to move on for very good economic reasons was Highway 37, south of Shaunavon coming into the community of Climax. I want to point out for you, Mr. Speaker, and for the benefit of our colleagues in the House how silly some of the previous decisions were made by the members opposite when they were in power. Highway No. 37 from Gull Lake to the river hill was a beautiful road, well constructed, one of the best highways in

the province. And in fact, I congratulated the Highways minister at that time for the quality of the construction. It was one of the best roads in the province.

From south there from the river valley, Swift Current Creek Valley to Shaunavon, moving further south, there was a reasonably good road. But it was starting to see some effects of a lot of truck traffic, and some wear and tear had taken a bit of a toll there. There was some new paving to kind of address some of that issue, which allowed primary weights to roll from the community of Gull Lake down to Shaunavon.

From Shaunavon south about 25 miles or 35 kilometres, there was a complete effort to rebuild that road over about three years. A lot of money was spent on the Frenchman River Valley. And it was a primary weight road, but primary weight trucks were not allowed to run on that stretch of road. You had 13 kilometres from the Frenchman River Valley to the community of Climax. From Climax you had another 13 or 15 kilometres to the US border. That entire stretch was left as a TMS road — a TMS road, Mr. Speaker. No primary weights were allowed on the new section from Shaunavon south to the river valley, and from there we had TMS roads to the border.

Now all the investment and primary weight construction from Gull Lake to the Frenchman River Valley, a distance of about 45 miles, was wasted because the corridor wasn't completed. Trucks that wanted to use that route to export product into the United States, into the southwest American market, couldn't use that road because they were not allowed to run primary weights on that particular stretch of highway. What is the purpose of spending a lot of money on primary weight construction for 45 miles and then leaving the remaining 20 miles or 32 kilometres TMS roads?

That's the kind of situation we're finding on highways throughout this province. And that's one of the things the new Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure is going to address. And we're starting to do that in the budget that we presented this year.

Mr. Speaker, we have the largest budget in the history of this province going into infrastructure. We have \$513 million — a 15 per cent increase over last year's expenditures, a \$67 million increase in real dollars. Now if there's a question about how much construction that will buy, let me put the minds at ease of the members opposite. We're going to see 800 kilometres of roads either rehabilitated or rebuilt or built new. And we're going to see 600 kilometres of road repaired and maintained this year.

Mr. Speaker, I hear the member from Nutana asking how many more kilometres over last year. Mr. Speaker, what they don't understand is they had a budget, but they never performed the work. There's literally hundreds of kilometres of work that was in the budget last year that was never done. We must do that this year. It might look good on paper. The numbers might look pretty small on paper, but the actual effect on the road network in this province is going to be very significant. Fourteen hundred kilometres of road in this province are going to see some level of work this year because of this budget. And, Mr. Speaker, not only that, we're going to find that the level and the quality of work is going to be significantly better.

When we were talking to the people of this province about what they wanted in highway construction, what they said is spend your limited resources in the most effective way possible. Don't spread \$300 million over 26,000 kilometres of road.

We're going to make sure that the roads are well built. We're going to make sure they're built to a primary weight standard. We're going to make sure that there is quality in the construction. And, Mr. Speaker, we're also going to start looking at new technology to make the construction more environmentally sustainable. That's what the people of this province asked for. The other thing they asked for, Mr. Speaker, was a plan — a very clear, concise, and readable plan. Mr. Speaker, that is what the Saskatchewan Party government in this budget is producing for the people of Saskatchewan. They wanted to know when the road would be fixed and to what level.

Mr. Speaker, as a result of the rollout of our five-year plan, we are going to be able to provide that information with predictability to the communities around this province. But, Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to overcome a 20-year deficit, a \$1 billion deficit, in 2, 3, 4, or 5 years, so we're going to roll out another five-year plan as we move through the first five-year plan, and people will understand clearly from the criteria we've established where their communities sit in the reconstruction process.

Mr. Speaker . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . well I hear one of the former Highways ministers chirping from his seat and it's really interesting. Mr. Speaker, I have a story to tell about another previous Highways minister. It was just after the election, and the former member from Meadow Lake met me in the cafeteria downstairs. We were having quite a nice discussion. And he'd come back for a cabinet meeting. Because he was unelected, he had to drive back. And he'd met me in the cafeteria, and you know what his comments were to me, Mr. Speaker? That's a long drive and, boy, those roads aren't very good.

You know here's a former Highways minister who had to admit the roads weren't very good. The last three Highways ministers, they didn't even drive the roads let alone fix them. They checked them out from 13,000 feet. Mr. Speaker, the roads look pretty good at 13,000 feet.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we have a very clear idea of where we want to go with our highways in this province. We have committed ourselves to a very clear set of standards to construct highways. We have negotiated with some communities. We're talking to others. We're looking for partnership opportunities. And we really think that the people of Saskatchewan, after long seeking, long desiring some clarity on this topic, will appreciate the approach that we're taking in highway construction.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that has come to my attention as a minister is the need to start replacing bridges and culverts in this province. We had at one time a whole initiative to build roads with short span bridges, but those bridges, when they were constructed, had about a 40- to maybe 50-year life expectancy. Those bridges mostly were constructed in the '40s and '50s. So as you can tell, Mr. Speaker, we're really coming to the end of the reasonable lifespan expectation for those

bridges.

So we need to undertake a very rigorous and strenuous effort to replace those bridges, in most instances with large culverts, but in some instances we're going to replace the bridge. But rather than the \$9 million we had forecast for expenditure in bridges, we're going to more than double that to nineteen and a half million dollars. And that's just this year's instalment, Mr. Speaker. There will be considerable monies of a similar nature in next year's budget and as we go forward.

It's very important that we deal with these decaying infrastructure issues as soon as we can. We don't want to be the government in power when a truck collapses a bridge. We don't want to have the same kind of devastation that occurred in Quebec when some of their overpass infrastructure collapsed on travelling vehicles. We don't want to have an episode, Lord forbid, like they had in Minnesota when that whole structure went down. We don't want to see loss of life in this province because we failed to take our responsibilities seriously. Mr. Speaker, we have a huge backlog of infrastructure that needs to be addressed, and this party, this budget, is starting to address that very problem.

Mr. Speaker, I have so much more I could say about this budget. I've got at least 60 seconds left, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there's been a few people from the other side who said well — you know what? — your five-year plan is the same thing as our five-year plan. Mr. Speaker, the difference will be that while they talked about it in the last few months of their mandate — they talked about a plan; I'll grant them that — but it was a johnny-come-lately kind of plan because even last spring when they introduced the plan, their own leader, the former premier, the now Leader of the Opposition, said publicly and he's quoted in the paper. What was the NDP plan for highways and infrastructure? Good question. “How we have been doing things in the past has been in many cases ad hoc without a long-term plan . . .”

That was the admission of the then premier, the current Leader of the Opposition. They never had a plan. They put a plan together. They cobbled one together in desperation in the last few months of their mandate, and now they have the nerve to sit in their seats and say they had a plan. They didn't fix roads according to a plan. Their own leader said it was an ad hoc approach.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. It will be a plan built on transparency and clarity. The people of the province will know when their roads will be fixed. They'll know the quality. They'll know the timing. They'll know the fact that this is good quality and environmentally sustainable construction, and I'm pleased as can be to represent that budget in the debate tonight.

Mr. Speaker, you don't have to take my word for it. The members opposite don't have to take my word for it. They might want to listen to the people of the province for a change. Let me recite some of the headlines that came about as a result of the budget released a week or so ago: “Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation welcomes overdue funding for K to 12

education.”

Here's a headline: “SARM pleased with provincial investments in infrastructure.” I'll read the quote:

Infrastructure is key to the future growth and development of this province and we are glad to see this government is committed to following through on its election promises and make a provincial investment in infrastructure.

Here's another headline: “Chamber supports strategic investments to promote future growth.” The “CFIB says provincial budget paves the way to prosperity.” I love the pun there. The headline from:

Saskatchewan Trucking Association president endorses highways budget — Highways department ‘on the right road.’

Mr. Speaker, “Mayor Fiacco says the provincial budget is a step in the right direction.”

Mr. Speaker, what gives me more pleasure than anything today is to read all 40 of the promises that we made in the election that were incorporated in this budget. Mr. Speaker, never in the history of this province has this kind of effort been made to incorporate the promises that a political party made on the campaign trail into its first budget. Most governments haven't be able to incorporate all their promises in budgets for four, five years. We did it in the first year.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Mr. Speaker, this is an initiative that I'm very proud of, and I'm pleased to have played a role in this. This is important stuff. It establishes the credibility of this government in the minds of the people of the province. They voted for us and now they know why they voted for us.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support this budget, and I have every expectation that the people of Saskatchewan will be well served by it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and respond to the government's budget. A budget is an important time for a province and an important time for a new government. In my remarks today I would like to spend some time discussing what this budget means for Saskatchewan and specifically for my constituents in Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Speaker, the Sask Party's first budget is a telling document. It is telling because it provides some clear insight into the nature of the Sask Party, and it provides some useful lessons for the people of this fine province, lessons that I will address towards the end of my speech, Mr. Speaker.

Thanks to fiscal discipline that the previous NDP government demonstrated and thanks to the hard work of Saskatchewan

people, the Finance minister had a mountain of money with which to build his budget. This mountain of cash has certainly made delivering our province's 15th consecutive balanced budget a whole lot easier.

You know I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I was more than a little amused in the early days of this government when the Premier made the remark that the province's finances were quote, "stark." Now most people in this province saw his comments for what they really were, simply an attempt to start the process of lowering people's expectations. After years of rhetoric and claiming to be all things to all people, after years of building up many expectations, the Premier realized the challenge of governing might be more difficult than he previously thought. But the Premier using the word stark to describe the massive amount of money his government inherited was laughable.

Perhaps the Premier needs to be reminded of what really is stark. Throughout our history, Mr. Speaker, there has been a stark contrast between the multiple terms of Tory rule and multiple terms of New Democratic governance. Many examples can be given to illustrate this stark contrast. We could look at job numbers, growth of GDP, number of new training seats, increase in housing starts, and the list could go on and on.

But, Mr. Speaker, when you really boil it down, I think the most stark contrast is this. When Tories leave government, there's a mountain of debt, and when New Democrats leave government, there's a mountain of cash. That's the stark contrast the Premier should be talking about, and that's the stark contrast he should keep in mind as his party rules this province.

Mr. Speaker, before getting into the heart of my speech, there are a couple of inconsistencies in this government's messaging that has caused me to scratch my head in disbelief. And, Mr. Speaker, this is not because I couldn't understand the remarks that the members made. Rather it is that these marks that the members made do not mesh in any way with what the Sask Party has been spinning for years.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is my first term as a member of this Assembly. So like most new members, I've spent some time looking back through past speeches and debates in *Hansard* out of curiosity and to gain a better understanding of the history behind some issues.

So as I was reading through *Hansard*, I came across some interesting statements from the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs, made on March 22, 2007. I was truly puzzled when I read his remarks, Mr. Speaker. You see, at the time the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs was the Sask Party's Finance critic, and he was responding to the NDP budget. And what did he say, Mr. Speaker? Well he said the 2007 budget was not a balanced budget. Oh he spouted on and on about what he claimed was a \$701 million deficit. A little further into his speech, he criticized the NDP for increasing spending by nine per cent. It was unsustainable, he said, and the sky was surely about to come crashing down.

Mr. Speaker, I hear some Sask Party members over there reacting to my remarks. I guess they too can't believe that the member from Silver Springs actually said things like this.

But wait, Mr. Speaker, that's not all. The member went on to describe the Fiscal Stabilization Fund as, quote, "an election slush fund." These remarks on their own aren't really that interesting or particularly insightful. But when these remarks are contrasted with the recent spin by the Finance minister, they take on quite a bit more meaning.

Mr. Speaker, the budget documents released by the Finance minister don't agree in any way with what the member for Saskatoon Silver Springs had been saying for years. You see, Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister's documents recognize the sound fiscal management of the previous NDP government. On the key facts and figures backgrounder, right under the title of sound fiscal management, it says . . . This is the quote, "15th consecutive balanced budget." Well that stands in stark contrast to what the Sask Party has been saying for years, Mr. Speaker. They used to constantly cry about the previous budgets being deficit budgets.

So it's good to see they've finally come around in their thinking, Mr. Speaker, to recognize the solid financial management of the NDP. After years of rhetoric to the contrary, they finally admit that the NDP delivered 14 consecutive balanced budgets and left a mountain of money behind to make the Sask Party's job of delivering a 15th balanced budget rather easy. Now that's a stark contrast, Mr. Speaker.

I also read in the budget summary that spending is going up 10 per cent. This too is rather puzzling when you look back at how agitated the member for Silver Springs was last year about a nine per cent spending increase. Again, Mr. Speaker, what a stark contrast between their past rhetoric and their current action.

Mr. Speaker, it's very puzzling to see the Sask Party's embrace of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Oh sure they've renamed and tinkered with it slightly, but make no mistake, the fund in its essence is the same. The Finance minister himself admitted this in the *Leader-Post* when he said, "fundamentally, there is very little difference." So once again, the before and the after is a stark contrast.

It's almost as though the Sask Party is experiencing a bout of collective amnesia. I would have assumed that the member for Silver Springs would have been able to find the time to brief the Minister of Finance on what the Sask Party rhetoric had been for several years. But I guess he was too busy, likely too busy reading some SaskPower reports that he has yet to share with the rest of cabinet. But that is the topic for a different speech, Mr. Speaker, so I will move on.

Mr. Speaker, while the Sask Party got some things right, they have left some gaping holes in terms of addressing the needs of Saskatchewan people. The first area is the Sask Party's failure to provide real property tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, no other incoming government in the history of this province has inherited such a strong financial situation as the Sask Party did last November. They are sitting on \$1.3 billion. In such lucrative times, Mr. Speaker, it is bewildering that all the Sask Party will do on the property tax file is give a meagre \$27 rebate to the average homeowner. This \$27 rebate is in stark contrast with what the Premier promised in his last

election campaign.

In his platform, he committed to, quote, “doubling education property tax rebates saving the average homeowner \$450 a year.” That’s a pretty explicit promise, Mr. Speaker, a promise which this government has failed to keep. They did not double education property taxes; they didn’t even come close to that. Rather they simply increased the rebate that homeowners receive on education property tax bills from 10 per cent to 12 per cent — a 2 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker. That’s a far cry from fulfilling their promise.

As for their promise to save the average homeowner \$450 per year, well they fall \$423 short on that promise. The average homeowner will receive just an additional \$27 in a property tax rebate. Now that’s a stark contrast, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I’ve been thinking about what \$27 means to my constituents. Twenty-seven dollars would buy a few delicious coffees and desserts from Café Vivant on 33rd Street. It would buy a good chicken supper from Chicken Delight. It might even get you half a tank of gas at the 33rd Street Co-op. So sure, it’d buy you a little bit, Mr. Speaker. But the likelihood of homeowners in my constituency actually being able to spend their \$27 on such purchases is slim because this government’s failure to adequately fund municipalities.

Allan Earle, the president of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association, said that the Sask Party’s budget “. . . will not allow municipalities to avoid property tax increases this year.” And the day after the budget, *The StarPhoenix* reported that “The provincial budget does not contain enough revenue sharing dollars for the city of Saskatoon to stave off another increase to its property tax rate this year, Mayor Don Atchison warned . . .”

Mr. Speaker, I don’t recall the Premier talking during the election campaign about forcing communities to raise taxes for the people of Saskatchewan. It’s strange, Mr. Speaker. On the one hand, the Sask Party is giving a skimpy \$27 of property tax relief, and on the other hand they’re forcing municipalities like the city of Saskatoon to increase property tax, so at the end of the day Saskatchewan people will be paying more and getting less. That meagre \$27 rebate that homeowners in Saskatoon Massey Place and across the province are supposed to receive will simply be gobbled up by higher taxes.

Even the Canadian Taxpayers Federation is frustrated by this, Mr. Speaker. Lee Harding said he is, quote, “. . . concerned because when Saskatchewan is doing so well as an economy, when you cannot see some kind of meaningful tax relief in a circumstance like that, it makes a person wonder if you’re going to see it at any time.”

Sitting on \$1.3 billion and not providing meaningful tax relief, that’s a stark contrast, Mr. Speaker.

Just days before the election the Premier said, “If we can make permanent property tax relief in Saskatchewan, it’s going to lower the cost of housing, whether it’s rental or principal residences’ . . .” But when he had a chance to act and actually do something, he failed to put his money where his mouth used to be. Rather he simply promised further study.

Well back when the member from Wood River actually had a voice around the caucus table and in this Chamber, he said regarding the property tax issue, quote, “There’s been enough study. It’s time for action.” On this issue at least, the Premier should take the member’s advice. They inherited a mountain of cash when they came into office, Mr. Speaker. Surely the Sask Party could do better and provide real property tax relief to Saskatchewan people.

Mr. Speaker, the second area that is a glaring oversight is any real action on affordable housing. Over the last several months, I’ve heard from many of my constituents about the critical area of housing — student housing, seniors’ housing, low-income housing, and the rising cost of rent. Affordable housing is a priority for many of my constituents and many people across the province, but if this budget is any indication, housing is not a priority for the Sask Party. They have done nothing to address this issue. They have done nothing to provide help to students or seniors or low-income people and they’ve done nothing to provide relief to renters.

As I pointed out earlier, the Premier really liked to use the word stark shortly after he was elected. Well the contrast between this side of the House and that side of the House could not be more stark than on the issue of affordable housing, Mr. Speaker.

Housing is an important issue for the NDP, but clearly it hardly registers on the Sask Party radar. Mr. Speaker, you may recall that the member from Regina Rosemont and I camped out with university students at the University of Regina. And several of us from the NDP caucus joined University of Saskatchewan students to draw attention to the critical issue of student housing. And we presented many petitions in this Assembly on the issue of affordable housing, Mr. Speaker.

[20:15]

And the previous NDP government allocated a lot of resources to a variety of housing initiatives. There was the \$200 million for the HomeFirst housing strategy to improve housing conditions for low- to moderate-income households, which resulted in almost 1,500 affordable housing units in communities throughout the province. The NDP increased shelter allowances and rental housing supplements for families receiving assistance. The NDP created a HomeFirst secondary suites program to help people build basement suites in existing housing. And the NDP helped some 500 families purchase a home with forgivable loans and a deferred repayable low-interest mortgage through the HomeFirst homeownership program. Clearly members on this side of the House recognize that housing is a critical issue for the people of Saskatchewan.

But what has the Sask Party done? They’ve simply created a housing affordability task force to spend more time studying the issue. No action, Mr. Speaker. What a stark contrast from the NDP.

The third area that the Sask Party fails to address in their budget is the need to continue to aggressively increase training seats. Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we know how important training spaces are, which is why the NDP continually invested in new training seats and new opportunities for young people to fully participate in our economy. The NDP budget last year

provided for an additional 2,000 new training spaces.

That stands in stark contrast to the Sask Party budget this year, which cuts the expansion of new training seats in half as compared to last year. At a time when our economy is booming like never before, at a time when the need for skilled workers is higher than ever before, the Sask Party slashes the increase of new training seats in half. Mr. Speaker, they've introduced a half-NDP budget that goes halfway towards addressing the critical issues.

This budget is apparently supposed to be about getting ready for growth. But without skilled workers, there will be no more growth, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, two years ago the member from Swift Current issued a little report entitled *Getting Saskatchewan Back on Track*. This report dealt with, quote, "the immediate labour shortage crisis." Back when the Sask Party was in opposition, they said the labour shortage was an immediate crisis. But now that they have a chance to act, all we see is less of the same. This budget fails to make Saskatchewan ready for growth because it falls so horribly short in providing the training spaces that are essential for our booming economy.

Another area where this budget misses the mark, Mr. Speaker, is in the area of the environment. The environment is a priority for my constituents, young people I meet at our universities and colleges, and for people across Saskatchewan. But unfortunately, it is not enough of a priority for the Sask Party government. Now to be fair, Mr. Speaker, it was a good thing that the Sask Party has adopted all the previous NDP government's targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. That's a good thing. But the problem is that they've gutted most of the funding that is necessary to actually meet those targets.

The Sask Party cut the \$320 million that the NDP set aside in the Green Future Fund to help our province to meet our emissions reduction targets. They simply cut it. So now under the Sask Party we have emissions reduction targets, but we don't have the money set aside to meet them. Rather we have a paltry sum of \$10 million put towards climate change with an obscure reference to 7.8 million of that as simply being earmarked for other green initiatives. Just 10 million and there's clearly no plan whatsoever for most of that money. That's a stark contrast from firm emission reduction targets with 320 million to meet them under the previous NDP government, Mr. Speaker.

There's a lot about this budget that falls short, Mr. Speaker. But there are some good things that I was pleased to see included in the budget. So let me briefly address two particular aspects of this budget that stood out for me.

In February 2007 the NDP government committed funding to the expansion of Oliver Lodge long-term care facility in my constituency. I am pleased that the Finance minister didn't pull the plug on that project and has allocated funds to continue this expansion. This is an important project. It will more than double the number of residents receiving care. It will enhance programming for seniors in my community, and it will increase specialized services for people living with dementia. So that's

positive, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, since community schools were first designated in Saskatchewan in 1980 under Blakeney's NDP government, they have played an important role in so many of our communities. Community schools are a crucial part of my constituency. I've had the opportunity to visit some of them, and I look forward to future visits as well. So I was pleased to see \$500,000 committed to school lunch and anti-hunger programs in community schools. That's a good thing, Mr. Speaker.

Those are two particular aspects of this budget that have positive implications for my constituency. So I thank the Finance minister for allocating that funding.

But, Mr. Speaker, I've identified four areas where much more needs to be done — property tax relief, affordable housing, training opportunities, and the environment. And as we look at this budget as a whole and as we observe the government's actions over the last while, we can gain a few insights about the Sask Party.

The first lesson is that we need to read the fine print. The government talks about a tuition rebate, but when we read the fine print, Mr. Speaker, it becomes apparent that the rebate is only for some students and not for others.

The government talks about expanding the \$15 drug plan, but when we read the fine print, we soon see how they are kicking out a whole bunch of seniors out of the plan who were previously covered by it.

On budget day the Finance minister stood in this Assembly and waxed eloquently that, quote:

Today's budget will benefit the hungry and provide care for the vulnerable adults and children in our society . . . Today's budget will support active and healthy families in Saskatchewan, and encourage safe and vibrant communities.

Well contrary to the minister's speech, the Sask Party ripped away the funding that has been given for Station 20 West initiative in one of the most stressed neighbourhoods in Saskatoon.

The plan for Station 20 West is to bring together a broad range of services including: affordable housing, a co-operative grocery store, a library branch, health care and dental services, a legal aid clinic, and community development offices. This is such an important project, Mr. Speaker. But contrary to Sask Party talk about safe and vibrant communities, the truth was in the fine print when we learned that their concern doesn't extend to the west side of Saskatoon.

Well they've tried to come off as moderate, their Harper tendencies — dare I say Devine tendencies — are beginning to shine through the glossy coat of paint. They're leading students out of the tuition rebate, they're kicking seniors out of the \$15 drug plan, and they're pulling the plug on a critical inner-city project. Clearly the brutal details are in the fine print.

The second lesson that Saskatchewan people can take away from this budget is brace yourself for its delivery. This is where it gets ugly. Let's look at Social Services for example, Mr. Speaker. After the complete fiasco we've seen in the last couple of weeks, Saskatchewan people are left wondering who is in charge of Social Services. The reorganization plans have left Social Services staff in turmoil. One income assistance worker is quoted in the *The StarPhoenix* as saying, quote:

"It's an emotional roller-coaster. It's been very hard on staff morale. The stress level has been phenomenal". . .

"And there has not been a whole lot of answers."

Now what does the minister do? Pathetically she slams civil servants and takes no responsibility for her decision she must have approved.

On the Station 20 West front, they ripped away the funding, and then they couldn't even get their story straight. One minister gave one reason, another minister gave another reason, and then the Premier himself came out and gave yet another reason. It's no wonder that just this past Saturday *The StarPhoenix* wrote that, quote:

Rather than appear to be competent managers of the public purse, Premier Brad Wall's team has been extravagant in its spending, ham-handed in its communications strategy and incompetent in its delivery.

My advice to the people of Saskatchewan — brace yourself for the ham-handed communications and the incompetent delivery.

The third lesson is that the Sask Party views the world through an us-versus-them lens. We actually see this right within the Sask Party itself, Mr. Speaker. The so-called voices of moderation, the self-identified liberals over there, like the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations, appears to be shut right out of decisions, totally ignored, serving as a token representative.

I would have thought that when the war on the poor was approved around the cabinet table and the funding was ripped away from Station 20 West that she of all people would have been a dissenting voice. So one can only assume that her voice is ignored. She's one of many over there who is clearly outside of the inner circle — the inner circle of old boys. That's also, by the way, a page right out of the federal Tory playbook.

But the us-versus-them approach doesn't only apply to the Sask Party's internal dealings. It extends to how they deal with the public and how they make funding decisions. I could give many examples, but the most pertinent right now is again the Station 20 West decision. Each minister says something different, but the Premier's is the most telling. He pretends that the private sector is chomping at the bit to set up a grocery store in the inner city and fails to understand that there hasn't been a real grocery store in the core communities for years.

This led *The StarPhoenix* to write:

But Wall's clear lack of understanding about the dire needs of core neighbourhoods and the history of

Saskatoon demonstrates just how out of touch he remains with urban Saskatchewan. Considering the role the province's largest city is playing in the economic revival of Saskatchewan, such ignorance could have dire consequences.

With the Sask Party, it's an us-versus-them approach in which a few benefit but most lose, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, to wrap up my response to the budget, some things about this budget are right but far too many things are wrong. This budget just doesn't hit the mark for my constituents. It fails to address the important areas of property tax relief, affordable housing, training opportunities, and the environment.

And, Mr. Speaker, the fine print reveals too many nasty details, the delivery of those details has demonstrated clear incompetence, and the Sask Party seems to view far too many issues with an us-versus-them lens. Sadly, my constituency seems to fall into the them category for this government.

Mr. Speaker, I will not be able to support this budget because to do so would be a betrayal of the people of Saskatoon Massey Place, who've sent me here to stand up on their behalf and to work to make their lives better. Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member from Martensville.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — I am pleased to rise today to speak to my government's first budget. And I would like to begin by thanking the Finance minister and his officials for all of their hard work. We were working on a much shorter time frame than normal, and I know that there was many late nights put in. And I want to express my appreciation to the Finance minister and to those in his office.

During the election campaign last fall, our party laid out a platform that contained numerous common sense and achievable ideas. We promised the people of Saskatchewan that we would keep our word to them, that we would keep our promises. In this budget we did just that.

I talked to a reporter on budget day and said to him, quite simply, that there were not a lot of surprises in this budget. The reason for that is we delivered in the budget what we promised people during the campaign. People could look at our campaign platform and see for themselves what would be in this budget. The one good surprise was the \$1 billion, ready-for-growth infrastructure fund — the largest capital investment in the history of this province.

After 16 years of NDP neglect, there is much work to be done to ensure that the economic momentum in our province is built upon and that we're ready for continued growth. The NDP left behind, after 16 years, crumbling highways and roads, overcrowded and broken schools and hospitals. And why is that? It is because the NDP never planned for growth. They planned at the very least for status quo, and at the worst, they

were planning for decline.

The NDP didn't have a vision for this province. They never truly believed that we would grow. They had no plans for the growth that we are seeing today. While the NDP apparently think that Saskatchewan is a great place to be from, we on this side of the house believe that Saskatchewan is a great place to be.

As we sit through question period and hear the preambles to the NDP questions with references to things that happened in the 1980s and the 1990s, it is very clear that they are looking backward. This new government is looking to the future. Saskatchewan is already leading the nation in many areas of growth. We are seeing a steady stream of people moving to Saskatchewan — some for the very first time, and many are returning after leaving for other provinces. And we welcome them all.

And we believe that it is incumbent upon our government to ensure that the services that people expect and deserve are here. People expect decent roads and highways. This budget has delivered over \$400 million for roads and highways. People expect schools for their children. This budget has delivered over \$160 million for capital projects and school improvements. People expect timely access to health care, and they expect safe health care facilities. This budget has delivered over \$190 million for capital and repairs. It also delivers 120 additional training seats for registered nurses, an additional 42 seats for health care professionals at SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], and expands medical student training positions to 100 and residency training to 120 over the next few years.

[20:30]

As Saskatchewan grows and prospers, we must take care to make sure that all of our province's citizens benefit. And we are addressing these needs as well. We have committed increased funding to school lunch and hunger programs. We have expanded prescription drug coverage to include children aged 14 and under. We have also committed millions more to food banks and community-based organizations that provide life and employment skills training.

Our most vulnerable citizens will also benefit from our province's prosperity. We exceeded our commitment with the caregivers tax credit. Funding for addiction centres, transition houses, and sexual assault centres has also been increased.

And what does the NDP have to say about all this? In their typical pessimistic attitude, they say it's not enough. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have one thing to say in response: what we delivered for the people of this province in this budget is more than the NDP ever did. The NDP had 16 years to address these issues and failed. That is their record.

I read through the NDP Finance critic's budget speech the other day and was once again taken aback by the sheer hypocrisy of his remarks. He complained that the property tax relief wasn't enough. However the reduction that we announced in the budget was exactly what we promised we would deliver. On top of that, the Premier has asked the member for Rosetown-Elrose

to develop a long-term plan to address this issue.

I would point out that the NDP promised to do this but failed. The NDP have been talking about fixing property tax issue since the days of Tommy Douglas. That's a six-decade record of failure and broken promises. The NDP leader boldly announced a few years back that, with respect to property taxes, the status quo was not on and then promptly proceeded with the status quo.

The Finance critic also lamented the fact that we used the NDP slush fund from their privatization of the NewGrade Upgrader for things other than an NDP slush fund. We chose to use it for things like highway construction, debt repayment as well as climate change initiatives. Shortly before the last election, the NDP sold off the provincial interest in the upgrader for a climate change slush fund right before the election. However they had no plan on how to use that money. It was nothing more than an NDP press release. Much of what the NDP did on this file is nothing more than a press release or a photo op.

The NDP's Environment critic complained that we were not keeping their climate change secretariat. There was nothing to keep because it never existed. It was nothing more than yet another NDP press release. When asked by reporters why a climate change secretariat was necessary, her answer was that only an NDP secretariat had the necessary clout to ensure that the government's policies were implemented. What a shocking indictment of the former NDP government and cabinet ministers. I find it interesting that the NDP's own Environment critic didn't believe that her government and ministers had the necessary clout to make sure their departments would get the job done.

The NDP's slush fund press release aside, our budget delivered an additional \$10 million per year for climate change and go green initiatives. This more than doubles what the NDP had allocated in their last budget. And speaking of the NDP's last budget and their last budget speech, I would point out once again that our Finance minister actually talked about climate change and go green plans in his budget speech. The NDP's last budget speech failed to even mention the word environment. The reason there is so much work to be done on this file is that, under the NDP, greenhouse gas emissions were allowed to rise by 62 per cent. Their bluster on this issue was absolutely hypocritical.

Instead of issuing press releases and organizing photo ops, we will work with Saskatchewan residents, business, Crowns, and industry to ensure that the money we spend through go green funding goes to projects that make a difference and offer real results.

We don't expect the NDP to endorse our budget. Their job as official opposition is to oppose, but as recent polls show, the people of this province are pleased with their new government. We are humbled by the support that we have received and will continue to work hard to earn that support. There are many who are very pleased not only with the specifics of this budget but with the new direction that this government is taking to ensure continued growth and prosperity for Saskatchewan residents, business, and industry. On our ready-for-growth infrastructure fund, business commentator Paul Martin said, and I quote:

With the title *Ready for Growth* the Saskatchewan Party directed its attention to infrastructure, the foundation for economic growth as we build a new platform to continue building upon. And the government's promise in the last election that it will deliver a growth agenda took a giant step forward.

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation president Dianne Woloschuk responded to the millions of dollars in new funding for education by saying, and I quote, "This is significant and in truth it's been long overdue." Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association executive director Donna Brunskill, on our government's commitment to addressing the nursing shortage, said and I quote, "For the first time in a decade I am confident that the RN shortage is getting the attention it deserves."

Denis Prud'homme, president, Saskatchewan Trucking Association, in response to \$400 million for highways said, and I quote:

This is an exciting time for truck transport. We're seeing a government that wants to lead change.

And to sum it all up, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce president, Steve McLellan had this to say, and I quote:

The new capital investments in post-secondary education, roads, municipalities, and healthcare . . . will help the province realize sustainable, strategic growth not only in the short term, but in the future as well.

And as I said earlier, there were not a lot of surprises in this budget simply because we are doing what we said we would do; we are keeping our promises. Prior to this budget, our government had already kept a list of promises. This budget adds to that list and keeps an additional 40 promises.

We are facing a pivotal moment in our province's history. Saskatchewan is a leading economic driver in Canada. We continue to lead the nation in many areas, such as housing starts, retail sales, and for the first time in a long time, in population growth.

The status quo is no longer good enough. It is the responsibility of government to plan for the future, not to look to the past. If we expect our province to continue to grow and to prosper, we must ensure that we have the infrastructure in place to meet that growth. We believe in our province. We believe in the potential of Saskatchewan people. And we believe we can continue to grow and prosper. And I believe that this budget is a first step in that direction. It is my pleasure to stand today to support my government's first budget. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member from Saskatoon southwest.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the budget, and I have taken exception with some of the opposition's comments on this so-called socialist opposition

that they call themselves. You know, Mr. Speaker, they make comments such as Regina Walsh Acres leaving the poorest of us behind or the Saskatoon Massey MLA saying, doesn't extend to the west side or the war on the poor.

You know, it's interesting to listen to them over there. I don't think one of them has lived a day poor. I grew up in the inner city, and when I look at my budget as a member of this party . . . where I grew up in the toughest inner city in Canada as a product of rape to a teenage mother. I listened to these people over there who haven't missed a day of meals in their lives — especially this one over here — who sit there with their smug little defence of trying to call themselves a socialist party while we lead in this province, in all of Canada, child poverty. We lead number one under their government of 16 years. We incarcerate more children in this province than anywhere else in North America, and 79 per cent of those children are First Nations. And you know, 16 years ago the MLA from Riversdale, when he was the Health minister, closed White Spruce and they continued to close treatment beds and program beds in these last 16 years. And while we incarcerate more children than anywhere else in North America, they haven't opened up one bed; they haven't opened up one program.

They announced Project Hope. And in three and a half million dollars they spent 750 million on a research Chair, trying to find out the answer that any grade 10 kid can go onto the Internet and find out and tell them what they're supposed to be doing, in addressing the crystal meth epidemic that's striking our poorest of kids in the inner city.

We lead the nation in child poverty per capita. We lead the nation in child prostitution; it's down to nine-year-olds. We're a national embarrassment under this government, under Riversdale of all places, a place that produced two premiers to this province, one deputy premier. They haven't done anything, but want to open up a grocery store and call it their big project of what they're going to do . . . [inaudible] . . . they're an embarrassment to this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — The reality of this government and what we've . . . [inaudible] . . . in 16 years of mismanagement of a so-called socialist government. You know, under the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation], they were a socialist government, Mr. Speaker. And then when Tommy Douglas decided that he was going to join and go into federal politics and change the direction of the CCF, they joined with unions, and they developed this manifesto, and they became partners with their unionist party. They're no longer a social party. Socialists, my . . . you can't be a socialist party if you lead the government . . .

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member from The Battlefords.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On a point of order. Yes, on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, you perhaps may wish to consult . . . in the last sitting of the legislature, there was quite a bit of debate primarily brought forward by members opposite in opposition, about the names of political parties and the discussions that took place across the floor, or

the debate that took place across the floor, in naming a political party.

We are of course proud to be democratic socialists, but we are not the Socialist Party of Canada. And I think that the rulings of this Chamber, directed by the members opposite in opposition, clearly indicate that the member speaking cannot refer to the people on this side of the House as members of the Socialist Party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member from Melfort.

Hon. Mr. Gantfoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to rise to respond to the point of order raised by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the member that had the floor, in speaking about the socialists opposite, are talking about a philosophy just as they always on that side of the House choose to label us as conservatives or any other label that they deem appropriate. Certainly they're not so sensitive and embarrassed by the philosophical approach that they are clearly identified with, have to take exception to the member who has the floor using it in that context, Mr. Speaker. And I would urge you to rule that the point is not well taken.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — In the member's comments I heard several references not in a capital letters, more as in a small letter, small "s" socialist as opposed to a capital "S." I will pay particular attention. If it does cross that line, I will take note.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — They try to make themselves out as being the only party with a heart, that somehow they're the only ones taking care of the poor or taking care of those who are suffering under the financial and economic disadvantage of poverty and the inner city, under the reality.

And yet we lead the nation in drug addiction with the least amount of resources put to it, where 79 per cent of our kids in the correctional facilities are First Nations with over 95 per cent of them with drug addiction problems, where there is a functional illiteracy rate of 80 per cent. This is all under their 16 years of government. As we begin to look at their track record, as they began to develop a social framework for our province, it isn't just the highways that fractured or the hospitals or the schools, but it was the complete social network that they allowed to collapse over 16 years.

And I'll give them benefit. At the beginning — and I'm new to this province of six years, so I'll say it — they talk about Grant Devine. I don't know him. What I do know is that they inherited 16 years ago a province that was tottering on economic collapse. And they began to move it back. That's fine. That's good for them.

But what have they done in the last 10 years, 12 years, 8 years, 4 years to begin to put back into the social policies of our

province? We're the last province in Canada that didn't even have a computer system to keep track of our kids. And within the system is that we were losing them and couldn't find them.

What were we doing for our First Nation kids as they were moving off the reserves and getting recruited into the heaviest and largest gang recruitment in all of Canada? As they began to put themselves on the street as nine-year-old children selling their bodies in order to live within the inner cities?

[20:45]

What have they been doing in the last four or five years that they have the audacity to stand up and say about this budget . . . which is putting more money in social programs, that is beginning to develop a network in the community, computer system that puts us back into the year of 2008 to track our kids, that is beginning to look at addiction centres . . . Wants to put 100 new beds of addictions, not make-believe Project Hope that has done nothing in the three years that it was in operation. It didn't put one bed into a program. Eighty-eight beds we have scheduled under this budget that we will put into place that will be actual beds.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — You know, if we begin to look at Social Services just alone, 164 per cent greater increase in the capital budget alone; \$3.2 million to implement the child and family services case management IT [information technology] system; \$200,000 to develop the interface between social services and personal health registry.

I mean I couldn't believe it as I went across last week into British Columbia and I spoke in Fort St. John and talked to ministers there, as I was in Thompson, Manitoba talking to people there, they were aghast that we wouldn't have a computer system in our Social Services tracking down our children. And yet the last social minister refused to put one into place when his ministry came and asked him to do so.

When we begin to look at the highlight, there's budget funding for not only a new computer system that will assist children in care, funds for additional child care workers, greater efforts to work with family services groups on reserves — which is ongoing — as well as 200,000 increase for total funding of \$470,000 to support the First Nation institute in developing a quality care management program to ensure that FNCFS [First Nations Child and Family Services] agencies would deliver better quality child care delivery.

You know, as a Cree . . . [inaudible] . . . I was embarrassed as I go into Quebec and speak on the reserves, and in Alberta, that I am an MLA in this province that had for 16 years MLAs representing First Nation people that has the poorest reserves in Canada, has the highest number of child prostitutes, has the highest number of gang recruitment, has the highest number of children incarcerated and they're all First Nations — 79 per cent of them.

When we begin to look into our inner cities which are the worst in Canada, which have been rated number one, that is equal to nowhere else . . . And I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, I grew up in the

toughest inner city in Canada in my time, as a boy to a 14-year-old First Nation girl, living in a rooming house. And that inner city has got nothing in comparison to the squalor and third world conditions that that government has allowed to happen over 16 years.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — When we begin to look at the reality to help low-income individuals and families, we got 1.1 million in increment funding for a total budget of 7.1 million to provide and support the increases for Saskatchewan rental housing supplements. Implemented, this will benefit 3,350 families, 1,140 households with disabilities, another one point million for child care parent subsidies. These are people from low-income parents, to break down the barriers.

And the audacity for them to say that we are leaving our poorest behind . . . they left them behind, and they went into the lie that somehow they were the only party that had social programs or cared about social programs. They're an embarrassment, a national embarrassment. They should change actually from the NDP to another type of party, because there's no similarity to any of the NDP parties in this country that have bankrupt provinces to help the poor. They haven't done any of that.

When we begin to look at our budget, we are increasing funding to school programs and hunger programs within our schools and in our city schools.

You know, when I worked with Ted Merriman as we travelled across this province and I talked to him about his founding of the Care and Share program and I said, why do you need to raise all of this money to feed inner-city kids, all of them First Nation? Why should that be happening? In one of the richest cities in Canada, why is this happening? Why isn't the government doing? And he said, they don't vote. They don't vote.

All they do is come out with the political rhetoric. All they do is want to attack the opposition, which was the Sask Party at that time and call them Conservatives.

And well I'll tell you, as a conservative party, as a moderate party, we have more heart in this budget than anything they ever stood for in the last 16 years of what they have produced in this province.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — You know, Mr. Speaker, you know they're an interesting party. They talk about on the one hand that during their tenure they're claiming credit for our economy. They're saying that they left all of this to us. It was their fiscal management. Well why didn't they spend the money to help the kids? Why didn't they begin to put the drug programs into place, to begin to expand the programs for kids locked into solitary confinement for 23 hours a day because we have no beds for them?

Why didn't they begin to address the system that's got 35 men sleeping on a gym floor using . . . [inaudible] . . . and the indignity of incarceration with no programs? Why didn't they

take that money and put it into programming? They didn't do it. They're claiming all of this fiscal management that they have done, that they have left us, this is if they had it all, why didn't they spend on social programs that we're spending it on?

When they talk about . . . they go back to the past, you know back and they say, but we're fiscally prudent. They've overspent. The last government before us overspent. We brought us . . . we're the salvation of this province. We've brought us into sound fiscal realities.

Well the reality of it is, we have come up with a budget that is fiscally prudent, that is balanced, that isn't going to take a billion dollars and throw it out and handing it willy-nilly to every program that's out there. We're doing is selectively building a foundation for our social programs, for our education, for our health, as we begin to claw this province back out of the dark ages that that NDP government brought us into in 16 years of mismanagement of our economy.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — You know it's really interesting, Mr. Speaker; they want to continue talking about this Station 20. And you know I'm very familiar with Station 20. But they did a wonderful job of building homes. And you know they built those homes; they're just about finished. The funding is there; it hasn't been taken away. They built a beautiful library; that hasn't been taken away.

But you know what they wanted to do was to . . . I don't know what . . . I'm not quite sure what they wanted to do. They wanted a grocery store, a co-op, so they could all hug trees, so that they could have this wonderful time. Well listen, I grew up in the inner city. I can tell you that Giant Tiger almost across the street is where everyone of those people in the inner city are going to shop. Why? Because it's cheaper to do so. And you know whether they sell lottery tickets or tobacco in this small grocery store that they want us to spend \$8 million in, I'll tell you I'd rather have that money go into our kids, into our addiction programs, into our juvenile custody programs, into the programs that are going to make a difference in the inner-city people's lives — not some silly building.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. LeClerc: — And I'll tell you what . . . You know, they talk about this clinic thing. Well you got Community Health Services in their letter just before our election, just a few months ago, winter 2007. This is what they said. They said:

First and foremost we have reviewed our involvement with an eye for protecting the long-term financial viability of our organization, alongside of protecting and providing the best possible health care services to this community. As a result of this work, we recognize that to be a tenant in Station 20 would require us to require substantial life-long financial commitment from our clinic. The costs associated and involvement with Station 20 are significantly higher than our current cost.

What they were trying to do, Mr. Speaker, is to get the West Side Clinic after 29 years of operation to sell their building.

And they were going to go lease it over there. And I met with them, and they said we can't understand it. We want to buy another building on the other side of the core; we weren't going to move. We own the building — 29 years. We paid the mortgage, and now they want us to sell the building and take that money that we have made from the mortgage and pay lease costs. And we don't even want to be there.

You know, and they talk about consultancy, and they talk about people being involved in the community. I've gone down in the community. I've talked to the inner-city ministries. None of them were involved with this thing. The only thing they were interested in was the housing which has been done, which has been paid for. We're not talking about removing anything from that. We're talking about from this warehouse type of building that's going to provide offices to . . . going to provide this and that. Well the West Side Clinic says we don't want to move. We'd rather be in our clinic; we'll provide double the services.

And you know us as a party, I'd take a look at the most pressing need of the inner-city — and it's eight years away under the NDP, eight years away they had the creation of new school — St. Mary's. That has put 100 people, more kids in the population of that school because they put programming in, they put pediatricians in. They're beginning to deal with the families. We audit \$8 million . . . we got to build that school because that's where the need goes for the kids — not for a building, not for some grocery store, not for some offices for somewhere.

And when they talk about the board, I'll tell you what they talked about in the clinic. They said the clinic has requested that the appointed board at Station 20 West be reconstituted as a community-based board, a democracy ruling by being elected by the tenants and by the community.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I look at who is on that board and see appointed the past CA [constituency assistant] of the MLA of Riversdale, I begin to wonder what is this all about. It certainly isn't for the benefit of the people. Not when they had — from eight years away — to rebuild the most important aspect to that inner city, which is St. Mary's School.

You know, the reality, I'm sick and tired of listening to them over there telling us that we're without a heart. When we take a look at this reality of this budget, it is balanced. As we begin to look at health care, to putting a children's hospital in the place; as we begin to deal with cancer victims, proper drugs for them; as we begin to look at the drugs that should be on the formulary; as we begin to look at the programming of addictions from our ministers for corrections, for inner city work, for anti-gang, for anti-poverty, for anti-child prostitution, I see it in this budget. I've never seen it in their budget. It was never balanced. It was always announcement after announcement — rhetoric — and it never got put into place.

Mr. Speaker, you know, they can cackle over there like a bunch of crows if they want to. They can do whatever they want to do over there. The reality of the truth of my words is in this budget, and it's their track record of 16 years. We lead the nation. Anybody can pick up the stats and see the child poverty, see the violence, the gang recruitment, the child incarceration, the child poverty, the degradation of inner city life among our most

vulnerable, which happened under their watch. Under our watch, we're changing it.

I support this budget, and I think their amendment is a childish piece of dung.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order, order. Order, order. Order, order. Order, order. Order, order. Order. I believe the member is aware that the last comments were inappropriate, and I'd just ask for a simple apology.

Mr. LeClerc: — I apologize.

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the budget in front of us. My only regret of course is that I have to follow the crap that we've just heard.

[21:00]

The Speaker: — Order. Order. I'd like to remind the member from The Battlefords that that language is inappropriate. And I would ask the member to, as well, apologize.

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would apologize.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to enter the debate today on the budget speech and the budget of the government. Mr. Speaker, there are quite a number of ways in which I would like to take a look at the budget in front of us today.

But before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention that indeed I was listening carefully to the speech from the member from Saskatoon Northwest. And there were some significant inconsistencies in his speech compared to what has been spoken by other members of government that I think people should be aware of.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, his criticism of Station 20 West in Saskatoon, Mr. Speaker, indicates a complete lack of understanding about that project, how it developed in the city of Saskatoon, and indeed the services that it's going to provide to the people of Saskatoon. And his comments are also at complete odds with the Minister of Health who was answering questions in the question period earlier today in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that Station 20 had its genesis in the community of Saskatoon. Station 20 came from individuals working with inner-city children and other families living within the inner city of 20th Street and that area of Saskatoon.

Mr. Speaker, a report was issued about a year and a half ago, the health determinates — a study — indicating the correlation between poor learning and poor health to poverty and lack of access to transportation and lack of access to services and lack of access to good quality food, Mr. Speaker.

And as a result of that study done about the people of Saskatoon, the community rallied. And they talked to the regional health authority, and the regional health authority talked to the Government of Saskatchewan. And a partnership emerged, Mr. Speaker, a partnership that ended up creating a response to the health determinates study, a response to the needs of the people in Saskatoon. And, Mr. Speaker, that partnership became Station 20 West, Mr. Speaker — not a shopping mall, not a grocery store, but a place that will meet the needs of poor people and, particularly, poor children in the inner city in Saskatoon. And the members opposite from Saskatoon Northwest, his comments indicate that he has no understanding whatsoever of where that project had its genesis and what it intends to do and how the partners, Mr. Speaker, are going to respond to that.

Secondly, he says that money shouldn't be used for a building; it should be used for food, it should be used for education, it should be used to help those kids. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health this afternoon said, the government can't spend that money because why? We need to put a new chiller on the roof of the hospitals in Saskatoon. We have to put new fire alarms. It's all infrastructure that the Minister of Health says. We can't spend the money on the kids because we're spending it on infrastructure on buildings.

Mr. Speaker, if the member from Saskatoon Northwest wants to lobby anybody about funding for children, he now has to talk to the Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, because that's where the diversion of funds is going, Mr. Speaker. It has nothing to do with any project, any plans that this government had in place. So the member from Saskatoon Northwest had better start understanding, Mr. Speaker, where things come from, where they're going to, and what the members opposite have to say about what is indeed the responses.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry that we're not going to have unlimited speaking time tonight, Mr. Speaker, because indeed there are so many things that the member opposite had to say that need some response, Mr. Speaker, but I've got things that I want to say about the budget, about The Battlefords, about my own critic area, Mr. Speaker, and certainly in general for the people of the province of Saskatchewan.

Let's take a couple of moments, Mr. Speaker, just to have a look at the genesis of this budget, Mr. Speaker, and where we find ourselves today in the province of Saskatchewan.

First and foremost I recognize that the government opposite were elected on November 7 — usually about halfway into the creation of a budget cycle, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge and recognize that the government — the new government opposite — came in to create a budget for the people of Saskatchewan with about half the time that a government normally has to produce a budget. So they've gone through the whole process of reviewing the status of the province, the circumstances that we find ourselves in. And, Mr. Speaker, they've got the election promises to put forward — how do they fund these? — those sorts of things.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, there was a very sound, a very sound fiscal foundation that had been built in this province over a long period of time. And as a result, this government has had the

opportunity to take advantage of that sound fiscal framework, that fiscal foundation, to work on creating a budget.

So when my colleagues here, Mr. Speaker, talk about this being an NDP-lite budget, or an NDP-like budget, Mr. Speaker, they are simply acknowledging that indeed this government had taken that foundational base, used that to create and put this budget together and, at the end of the day, have left Saskatchewan in a situation whereby while there are some things being done, they're building on other things that have already been done and at the same time recognize that there's a surplus that's going to have to be used into the future. And I'll have more to say about that in a moment, Mr. Speaker.

But all in all what we've got here is a government that's inherited more money than any other government has inherited from an outgoing government for use into the future. And, Mr. Speaker, this government has inherited an economy that's better than any other economy than any government anywhere in North America has inherited from an outgoing government.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that with an economy that's less strong than in the province of Saskatchewan, the province of Manitoba last year re-elected their New Democratic Party government, Mr. Speaker, with an economy that wasn't as strong as ours or with a foundation that wasn't as strong as this one. In the province of Ontario they re-elected the Liberal government there. The people re-elected the Liberal government there, again with a collapsing economy and no money in the bank, Mr. Speaker.

So this government knows that they are very fortunate, very fortunate indeed, Mr. Speaker, to have inherited a lot of money. The surplus in this budget here — the Fiscal Stabilization Fund that we used to call it, the fiscal security fund — that Growth and Security Fund that they now call, has \$1.3 billion, Mr. Speaker, in the bank that government can use for funding additional programs. And I'm going to have more to say about that in a minute.

But never, never has a government inherited so much money from an outgoing government. The question that Saskatchewan residents have to ask, Mr. Speaker, is what did they do with it? And we're going to come to that too in a minute.

So this budget contains an awful lot of what New Democrats had started, what New Democrats began while we were in government, Mr. Speaker. It continues a lot of those things. And in fact even those things that the members opposite were very critical about in opposition, this budget contains those as well.

And I point out, as my colleagues have as well, simply the use of the fiscal stabilization and the balanced budget process, Mr. Speaker — the same as what New Democrats did in government for a number of years and that they criticized us for year after year after year. In fact the member from Saskatoon Northwest indicated that the NDP had never balanced a budget, and yet the budget documents opposite indicate that this is the 15th balanced budget, Mr. Speaker, recognizing, Mr. Speaker, that there were 14 balanced budgets before this one came along.

And how is this budget balanced, Mr. Speaker? This budget is

balanced on the basis of the use of the fiscal growth and stabilization fund, Mr. Speaker. They talk for years, Mr. Speaker, about how this Fiscal Stabilization Fund was funny money; it was no account. Yet, Mr. Speaker, all across, all across the world where Saskatchewan went for bond dollars, Mr. Speaker, for funding to cover our debts, Mr. Speaker, the bond rating agencies and the lenders in the world, Mr. Speaker, in Europe and in the United States, recognized the Fiscal Stabilization Fund as a valuable tool for helping to ensure that the economy was well run.

Mr. Speaker, the government opposite used those tools in this budget to balance this budget. We recognize, we support, that concept. We just don't understand how one day it can be so wrong and the next day it can be so right by the members opposite — say one thing before an election, Mr. Speaker, do something completely different after the election. I just point that out, Mr. Speaker, for the people at home who may not have read all of the budget documents or heard all of the speeches that have come up to this point.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other interesting things when we look at the budget overall. Let's take a quick look. Mr. Speaker, I believe in simplifying things. I really firmly believe that it is better to understand a matter from its simplest perspective and then build out from that to help to understand some of the complexities. The simplest part of this budget, Mr. Speaker, is at the bottom of the page. The bottom of the page says, a \$250 million surplus which will be used to pay down debt. We go up the page just a little bit, Mr. Speaker, and we see that in revenues, in revenues, there is a dividend declared from the Crown Investments Corporation. That dividend from the Crown Investments Corporation, Mr. Speaker, comes from the sale of the NewGrade upgrader, the asset that the government has sold and brought those revenues into the GRF [General Revenue Fund].

Mr. Speaker, that dividend, that dividend from the Crown Investments Corporation, revenue in the budget, Mr. Speaker — \$375 million. What was that surplus number I just pointed to at the bottom of the page, Mr. Speaker? \$250 million. Without of the sale of the NewGrade upgrader and the dividend from CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan], this government did not have enough money to balance this budget, Mr. Speaker. They would've had to have used Fiscal Stabilization Fund money to balance this budget. And they have chose, they have chose not to do that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are talking a lot about, over there, who sold it. Mr. Speaker, there was a plan that was put into place by the previous government to utilize the sale of this energy asset to assist the Crown corporations with developing green initiatives to assure us of a strong response to the emissions issue and the whole issue of improving our environment, Mr. Speaker.

This government has scrapped that plan, scrapped that plan completely, brought the money into the GRF and at the end of the day is using that money for general operating procedures and paying down the debt because that's what the bottom line when you simplify the budget is all about, Mr. Speaker. Let's also talk . . . And the member from Saskatoon Northwest is clapping about getting rid of environmental protections, Mr.

Speaker, and paying down the debt.

Mr. Speaker, this was an asset that was created from energy resources that had contributed to carbon in our atmosphere and we were going to use the dollars to reduce carbon emissions, Mr. Speaker. The member from Saskatoon Northwest, the members opposite should pay very close attention to what's happening here.

The other thing is the whole debate around Crowns, Mr. Speaker. If there's anything that points clearly to the benefit to government and therefore ultimately the benefit to the people of the province, of the Crowns, Mr. Speaker, is the dividend paid by the Crown Investments Corporation to government. It is revenue in the budget. That revenue can be then used for purposes that are beneficial to the people of Saskatchewan. The Crown Investments Corporation dividend is an important part of the budget.

I want to talk just a little bit more about why that's important, Mr. Speaker. Take a quick look on the expenditure side of the budget, Mr. Speaker. If you take education and health care, you all remember, Mr. Speaker — everyone will remember — the good old days where we used to have an education and health tax, before the provincial sales tax came along. We utilized retail sales taxes to help with and pay for education and health care in this province. That was removed. The provincial sales tax came into being, and of course that then started to help fund generally the work of government.

[21:15]

But where are the expenditures, Mr. Speaker, on education and health care today? Well take a look at the budget. Advanced Education budget is \$761 million. The budget for Education, Mr. Speaker, \$992 million. And of course the budget for health care — record spending — 3.7 billion. Mr. Speaker, you add education and health care spending in this budget, it's \$4.6 billion.

Go to the next page, Mr. Speaker, revenues. How much revenue do we take in in taxes in this province, Mr. Speaker — corporate tax, fuel tax, income tax, sales tax, tobacco tax, other tax — what's the number? \$4.6 billion, Mr. Speaker. We spend every dollar collected in taxes on education and health care in this province, Mr. Speaker. Every dollar, one for one — 4.6 billion.

So how do we fund everything else in government, Mr. Speaker? How do we fund it? We fund it from non-renewable resource revenue, Mr. Speaker. It's cyclical. It goes up. It goes down. Sometimes we have it. Sometimes we don't. It comes from transfers from Crown entities, Mr. Speaker — dividends from the Crown Investments Corporation, dividends paid by the Crowns, Mr. Speaker — really another show of how valuable those Crown revenues are to the people of Saskatchewan. They help to pay for everything above education and health care.

What are the other revenues? Of course, fines, penalties, fees, permits — things that everybody wants to get rid of eventually, Mr. Speaker. But of course that's part of the revenue of government. And then lastly, Mr. Speaker, transfers from other governments. What other governments? The federal

government, Mr. Speaker — equalization and an energy accord. There is no better argument for this province settling with the federal government on equalization and an energy accord than this budget, Mr. Speaker. Those federal revenues continue to be important not just for today but down many years into the future.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is currently representing every taxpayer dollar is paying for education and health care. The other revenues of this government, of this province, Mr. Speaker, are important to pay for all those other things — highways that they're spending lots of money on of course and hospitals, the infrastructure pieces, Mr. Speaker.

That equalization ball that's in the air has been dropped by this government, Mr. Speaker. It needs to be picked up. We need to go to work. We need to ensure that the resource revenues that we collect stay in this province and work for the people of Saskatchewan, just the same as those resource revenues work for the people of Alberta and those resource revenues are today working for the people of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, that's very important for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk just briefly about my own constituency. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of The Battlefords. I'm very proud of the people who live in The Battlefords and, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the work that's going on in The Battlefords. And I've been very happy to have assisted the people in The Battlefords over the last four years to have the ear of the provincial government to gain access to various government departments and programs and initiatives to the benefit of the people in The Battlefords.

But, Mr. Speaker, I've spent a lot of time recently on doorsteps and in coffee shops, at the curling rink, at the community theatre, talking with people throughout The Battlefords. And it's very clear from those discussions that the major issues in The Battlefords today can be outlined very simply as, number one, housing.

We have a booming economy. We have a very strong economy, and of course that means we've got new workers coming into the community. We have people from other surrounding communities coming into the community. We have seniors. We have students. We have immigrants, Mr. Speaker. Actually The Battlefords is very pleased to be able to say we have 10 per cent of the province's immigrant nominee program now located in The Battlefords. We've done very good job, Mr. Speaker, of attracting and settling immigrants into our local workforce.

Well all these people coming into The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, has put a tremendous amount of pressure on this community for housing. It is a direct result of the economic boom that has taken place on the west side of the province and obviously in other parts of the province as well.

Now housing — number one issue. Students, seniors, First Nations people, young people moving in for jobs, and of course our new immigrant population — number one issue.

Number two, infrastructure highways, Mr. Speaker. Recently the town of Battleford's town council, members of the chamber of commerce from the town of Battleford, citizens in the town

of Battleford have been talking with the Department of Highways about developing a piece of road, Mr. Speaker, that comes off of Highway 16 and Highway 4. It's very necessary to create a new commercial, industrial, and residential subdivision to meet the growing needs of our growing community.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the government members since November 7 have been saying wait, wait, wait; we're going to give you our highways budget. You've got an important project here; it would be a priority of this government. You just wait, be nice, good little people and wait, and our highway budget will come out some time after after the budget, Mr. Speaker.

Well last week the highway budget comes out. What's in year number one? Nothing there for town of Battleford. What's in year number two? Nothing there for the town of Battleford. Absolutely nothing on a project that they were indicating was going to be a priority project for them and is directly related, Mr. Speaker, to the growth of the economy — the growth of the economy of Saskatchewan, the growth of the economy of a community in the heart of oil country, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important project for the future of our community, and I would urge the government to give careful consideration not only in this budget but in the mid-term and in next year's budget, Mr. Speaker, to projects like this whereby municipalities have identified ways in which to utilize their infrastructure to ensure that the growth is able to be met by those communities.

Also, Mr. Speaker, one of the most important projects in The Battlefords is the Saskatchewan Hospital, Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan Hospital. Two years ago, February 2006, Mr. Speaker, the community was pleased — excited, delighted — to find out that the Department of Health and the Government of Saskatchewan was supporting the rebuilding of Saskatchewan Hospital, North Battleford.

Now, Mr. Speaker, last year's budget put \$1 million in place to facilitate the planning for that project. Mr. Speaker, this year there's nothing in the budget for Saskatchewan Hospital. A \$60 million project a couple of years ago, now it's probably a \$90 million project. Mr. Speaker, that project is going through a continued phase in its planning process. There has to be some acknowledge, some commitment from this government, to ensure the people of The Battlefords that that project is still in progress, is still going to go ahead as was promised and projected and planned previously. Sask Hospital, Mr. Speaker, project number three that's important to us.

Fourth, immigration is important in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated we've already got 10 per cent of the provincial nominee program active there, and over the next year we're looking at another 70 people and their families moving into The Battlefords to meet some of our labour force needs.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the community college has recently started to offer a English as a second language program, highly respected within the immigrant community. Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure that those community college programs and others about settlement in the community are able to be enhanced and are able to continue to provide the needs for the community and of course, Mr. Speaker, our First Nations community. We are surrounded by 10 separate, individual First

Nations communities, Mr. Speaker, around The Battlefords — a large population, a large, young population, Mr. Speaker, that will be of great assistance to meeting the labour shortage in and throughout The Battlefords.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, despite what the government opposite says — the First Nations people know this more clearly than anybody else — First Nations people know that in this budget, for First Nations people in communities like The Battlefords, there's absolutely nothing there to facilitate their inclusion in the development of the workforce in and around communities like The Battlefords.

We need to see more of that and, Mr. Speaker, generally the labour shortage — what further assistance is there from the government representing the people of The Battlefords to ensure that the labour shortage that exists is going to be dealt with?

Mr. Speaker, I was online the other day. Jobs are currently posted, available jobs in The Battlefords. Mr. Speaker, this is a community of under 20,000 people. The number of jobs available in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, 378 jobs available today in the community of The Battlefords — very large number of job shortages. Our business community is anxious to see that they can go forward.

And lastly, Mr. Speaker, something that I was very close to in the past and something that I remain very close to, Mr. Speaker, finally, education property tax relief. During the election campaign, the people of The Battlefords were pleased that the candidates in all the political parties were campaigning on a platform of education property tax relief, Mr. Speaker. They were. They believed the members opposite. They believed the members opposite when they said, if elected, we will double the education property tax credit, Mr. Speaker — they will double. Therefore they expected that that relief would go from 10 per cent promised and delivered by New Democrats, Mr. Speaker, to 20 per cent from the members opposite — that was the campaign promise. But, Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, what do we get in this budget? We get a 12 per cent credit instead of what was in place — a 10 per cent credit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're not naive in The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker. Property tax collected on the average house in North Battleford is probably around \$2,800, equally split between municipalities and school boards. So you've got \$1,400 collected by the municipality. You've got \$1,400 collected for education.

Well, Mr. Speaker, 10 per cent, which was the credit they were getting on that \$1,400, Mr. Speaker, is \$140 credit they were getting from the New Democratic Party government. What are they going to get this year on that, on that \$1,400? A 12 per cent credit, which is \$168, Mr. Speaker, or a difference of \$28.

The people of The Battlefords, Mr. Speaker, when this government was elected, expected — expected — a credit that was worth at least \$300. They get a credit worth \$168, Mr. Speaker. That \$28 promise has disappointed every person who did not vote NDP in that last election.

Every, every small "c" conservative, every Sask Party supporter

in that community right now is disappointed because that promise, Mr. Speaker, was not kept — \$28 — they're embarrassed, Mr. Speaker. They're embarrassed to sit in the coffee shop and say, my government gave us \$28, \$28 on education property tax relief.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue. We said at the top \$1.3 billion in Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Surely to goodness they can do better on education property tax relief.

So, Mr. Speaker, I've gone over my time. I appreciate the ability to speak. As you will know, Mr. Speaker, I was kind of thrown off my speech by the member from Saskatoon Northwest and his crazy talk just before I got up.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that I was very pleased with the speech that was delivered by our Finance critic, the member from Regina Douglas Park, the other day. I would commend the reading of that speech to every member of the public. It's an almost good budget. It needs some tweaking. Certainly in The Battlefords it needs a lot more attention, and, Mr. Speaker, it's my intention over the course of the next few weeks and months to ensure that we hold the government account for those promises and for the delivery of programs to people in Saskatchewan like those who live in and around the communities of The Battlefords.

[21:30]

So, Mr. Speaker, I give you my indication that I am supporting the amendment. I'm not supporting the government motion to support the budget, and I thank the members of the House for their patience this evening. Thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to enter into the debate on the budget tonight — a budget that's ready for growth, a budget that keeps promises, and a budget for everyone in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

First though I want to thank the Finance minister and his officials as well as the other members of Treasury Board that I sat on with for the great time and for the advice and leadership that was provided to me as a brand new MLA. Thank you very much from a brand new minister.

This is a very historic budget, Mr. Speaker. It's the first Saskatchewan Party budget that gets us ready for growth as we move forward. And especially important to me, having two young daughters, it sets up their future, Mr. Speaker, and I thank this government for that chance.

Many promises already have been kept by this government. Even before this budget was delivered we were keeping them. A promise to toughen penalties for repeat drunk drivers, Mr. Speaker . . . and from my background, Mr. Speaker, the police community just thought that was the greatest thing to hear that

initiative right off the hop, to see a government that's going to keep their promises and especially be tough on crime. That gains credibility we'll get the job done, Mr. Speaker.

A promise to provide cancer patients with access to drugs to prolong their lives, that was a no-brainer that took 16 years to get done, and as far as I'm concerned that alone will make this government much more credible to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

We came to power with an ambitious agenda and are serious about the work ahead of us, and we are keeping our promises. Mr. Speaker, a little history lesson here. On March 31, 2003, the member from Regina Dewdney stood up in the House for his budget debate speech and I am quoting the member for Regina Dewdney, when he was talking about what he thought the people of Saskatchewan wanted, the member from Regina Dewdney said, "They don't want a government that would be out there promising to give them everything and not being able to deliver any of it."

That is a direct quote, Mr. Speaker, from the member opposite. Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears that the people of Saskatchewan do want a government that makes promises and keeps them, Mr. Speaker.

In the first year of our mandate, in our first budget, heck in less than five months in office, Mr. Speaker, we have kept more than 40 of our promises to the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — We did not, as the member from Regina Dewdney said, promise the people everything, Mr. Speaker. We did however promise what the people wanted and what the province needed, Mr. Speaker. And we are delivering on those promises.

On November 7, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan told us that yes, they do want a government that keeps its promises, and the 2008-2009 budget does just that, Mr. Speaker.

This is not a budget that relies on federal handouts or a budget that will spend \$100 million of taxpayers' money for a mill that closed during the NDP's tenure and was unlikely to ever re-open under their anti-business government.

This is a budget that is ready for growth, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to this government's fiscal prudence, the 100 million the NDP would have squandered to buy votes is now available for investment in Saskatchewan's future, Mr. Speaker. The voters of Saskatchewan and in my constituency of Prince Albert Carlton saw through this election ploy, Mr. Speaker. In the 2003 election of Prince Albert Carlton, voters cast 1,891 ballots for the Saskatchewan Party. The NDP won the riding that election, Mr. Speaker. And the former Speaker of the House was a well-respected member of Prince Albert, and he truly was a great member to the people of Prince Albert before he was a Speaker, so no disrespect to him whatsoever even though he served in an NDP government; he's a great man.

But in the recent 2007 election there was a very different result, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 3,675 ballots were cast for the

Saskatchewan Party in the vote that I won, Mr. Speaker — almost double the 2003 votes. And in that case, Mr. Speaker, the NDP lost votes this time around in 2003. This shows the people of P.A. [Prince Albert] Carlton saw through these desperate last ditch efforts by the NDP to hold power.

Saskatchewan's time is now. The signs are all around us, Mr. Speaker. Just last week it was announced more than 3,000 people have moved to our province in the last quarter of 2007. Overall more than 16,000 people moved here last year, Mr. Speaker. We are an economic leader in North America.

The Canada West Foundation is forecasting Saskatchewan to lead the nation with economic growth of 3.6 per cent in 2008. Building permits are up. We are number one in the country for housing starts, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment is among the lowest in the country. We have an abundance of natural resources. The economy is red hot, and we are the envy of the rest of the country, Mr. Speaker. We are ready for growth, Mr. Speaker.

But if we are to sustain our economic momentum, we need to ensure that infrastructure is in place for growth. That is why the Saskatchewan Party government has invested \$1 billion in infrastructure in the province — \$1 billion, \$1 billion, \$1 billion. This unprecedented investment focuses on our capital efforts, on long-term economic and social solutions. Our roads, our schools, and our health facilities across the province will benefit from this investment.

In fact, to go back to the \$100 million that was going to be squandered on Domtar, Mr. Speaker, to buy votes, I truly believe that money will be spent in my local constituency and surrounding area for health care, education, and infrastructure.

We promised to fix the crumbling highways, and we are. Over 1400 kilometres of highway construction and maintenance is planned for this year. New bridges, improved bridges, highway twinning, and upgrades to northern and rural roads will happen this year. Over \$500 million will strengthen our roads and highways, Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget.

Over \$160 million is going to repair and upgrades for schools, university, and training centres, Mr. Speaker. Nearly \$200 million will go to health facilities and hospitals for key repairs, upgrades, and to help purchase new medical and safety equipment — addressing that deficit, Mr. Speaker, in health care . . . long overdue. The ready-for-growth initiative also includes capital spending plans for municipalities, parks, and other priority areas. We are serious about growing this province and creating a successful future. This balanced budget is a start, Mr. Speaker.

A shortage of health care professionals is also a barrier to growth. Well, Mr. Speaker, this budget helps remove those barriers with money for expansion in nurse training seats and increasing our capacity to train physicians right here in Saskatchewan. Recently the government signed a historic agreement with the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, an agreement that commits to hiring 800 new nurses by 2011. This is the Saskatchewan Party government keeping promises. And in fact on that note, Mr. Speaker, 300 new nurses from the Philippines will be arriving in Saskatchewan. We're halfway

there already in five short months.

I'm pleased that my ministry, the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, has been well represented in this budget. This budget underscores the government's commitment to keeping Saskatchewan citizens safe and free from the fear of crime under our securing-the-future agenda.

When the NDP formed government in 1991, the Leader of the Opposition had some dreams. In the December 11, 1991, *Hansard*, the current Leader of the Opposition is quoted as saying, quote:

. . . we are a government that dreams of a province where women and children and men can live and walk in their communities and walk on the campuses of our province without fear, without fear of violence, Mr. Speaker. We dream of a new society without . . . fear of violence, and we say why not?

Yes, why not, Mr. Speaker? Those are some noble dreams, Mr. Speaker, but they were only dreams for the opposition and for the people of Saskatchewan while the NDP formed government. In reality the NDP created a nightmare for the women and children and men of this province. After 16 years of a tired, old NDP government, Saskatchewan has the highest crime rate in the country. In 2006 Saskatchewan reported the highest crime rate in Canada for the ninth year in a row, Mr. Speaker. This budget makes our communities safer, with more police officers on the street, and more resources to fight gangs.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — This government promised to hire more police officers, Mr. Speaker, and we are doing just that. This year 30 new police officers will be keeping the citizens of Saskatchewan safe — 30 officers who are part of a four-year commitment to put 120 more officers on the streets.

As most people know, Mr. Speaker, I was a police officer. I know what officers and citizens face every day in this province, and I know putting more officers out there will make the streets safer. Additional funding for the Saskatchewan Police College, where I received my training and all new municipal police officers in the province receive their training, ensures that our officers are ready for duty. Specialized units to protect children from Internet predators and units to target organized crime and gangs are promises we are keeping, Mr. Speaker.

This budget calls for 11 officers for the Internet child exploitation unit or ICE. These officers will cover all areas of the province, and they will be both municipal and RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers. This unit helps protect our children from Internet exploitation. And as a recent high-profile case shows, they were desperately needed, Mr. Speaker.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, although the previous administration funded this position, this unit for four officers, they never deployed resources to that unit, Mr. Speaker. And I have to wonder, had they actually been committed to the safety and security of our citizens, that family in Swift Current may have had a different outcome, Mr. Speaker.

We will also put officers on First Nations — one on the Dakota Whitecap First Nation and one on Fishing Lake First Nation, Mr. Speaker. Other municipal officers will be added for community policing. Officers will also be added to the RCMP major crimes section, and new officers will be added across the province for organized crime and gang investigations.

Violence reduction related to corrections is also a key priority of this government, Mr. Speaker. This budget will help the ministry advance its violence reduction strategy inside the province's correctional centres, as well as helping achieve similar objectives for offenders released into the community. By reducing offending in facilities, we can work to reduce the same behaviours that cause reoffending in the community.

In-facility treatment units to deal with substance abuse among inmates will also be established in this budget, Mr. Speaker. Addictions treatment is part of the programming made available through the corrections system to help offenders successfully reintegrate back into their communities.

Construction of the replacement of the oldest part of the Regina Provincial Correctional Centre will be completed this year, Mr. Speaker. We are on schedule and on budget. Services will be transferred to this new facility by September of this year. A new kitchen will also be constructed at Regina Correctional Centre to meet the capacity needs of the facility.

Construction will also begin on a new 90-bed dormitory in the Saskatchewan provincial correctional centre, Mr. Speaker. This dormitory will help free up programming space that had been used for housing inmates. At the same time, the new dormitory will help alleviate overcrowding at the Saskatchewan correctional centre, Saskatoon Correctional Centre, that posed security and occupational health and safety risks. The new bed spaces will be operational in the fall.

A huge priority for my ministry is public safety, Mr. Speaker, and part of that safety is response to emergency situations. Last year there was extensive flooding in many parts of this province, particularly in the Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake areas. While the previous government promised help, they didn't deliver on that promise, Mr. Speaker.

But this budget provides \$4.7 million to help residents protect their properties against future floods. This is in addition to the \$4.2 million previously announced before the budget — \$4.2 million. These grants will be used in a cost-sharing program in order to mitigate future damage from high water levels. While we could not cover all of the losses, Mr. Speaker, we can help the communities develop their own flood protection plans and prevent future flood damage. Despite the significant amount provided to residents of Fishing Lake and Waldsea Lake for flood protection, residents still must pay at least half of their own costs for their flood protection solutions, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, this budget does many things. I mentioned how it provides a future for my two girls. My wife will see funding as a teacher in the education system as well, Mr. Speaker. My colleagues in policing will see funds as never before. We will find in fact that we will see money going to the right needs to address crime trends, as we address issues like gang violence, drugs in institutions, drugs in the communities.

And more recently, the sexual predators who hunt our children on the Internet, Mr. Speaker, we're going to hunt them down now.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that secures the future for the residents of this province, a budget that keeps promises, and a budget that is ready for growth, Mr. Speaker.

On Thursday I spoke at the chamber of commerce in Prince Albert luncheon, on this budget, to a packed house. My colleague from Sask Rivers was there. And I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker — rounding applause every time I talked about the positive nature of our promises we're going to keep, where the future of this province will go under this government, Mr. Speaker. The people in Prince Albert truly believe that this budget has their future in mind as well. Prince Albert will benefit from this surely.

This is a budget that I support, Mr. Speaker; in fact, I am proud to do so. I support this budget and do not support the NDP amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[21:45]

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member for Yorkton.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am very excited to stand in the House tonight, late this evening, and speak on behalf of this budget.

I'm pleased to be here, the first ever budget by our government, and the '08-09 budget. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there is so much excitement in the province. I know I've seen your Speaker's gallery has been just totally filled with people up there tonight, came all the way from Yorkton to watch the proceedings. Our side of the House is packed, and I want to echo the sentiments of my colleague from Prince Albert.

When I spoke to the chamber of commerce on Wednesday morning, Mr. Speaker, they were totally excited that they had about 50 per cent more people there to show up for my budget presentation than they expected. So things were really happening in Yorkton — a lot of happiness in the city.

People are very excited. There is a lot of opportunity. There's a lot of good things happening in the province. And you know, Mr. Speaker, the excitement's just continually grown ever since November 7, where, you know, Saskatchewan people, they made a choice.

Yorkton had been a NDP stronghold for many, many years, and the people saw fit to support myself and this government and the Premier Brad Wall in this last election. They're excited about our ideas, our commitments, and the energy we have to sustain the momentum, the economic momentum of the province.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, upon doing some interviews in Yorkton over the past week, one interview asked me how we came up with such a great budget in only four months. There must have been a lot of prep work done. I should tell you, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the history of how we've come around to this, where we are today, there actually has been some groundwork done. A lot of work done ahead on our policy development, Mr. Speaker, policy that I had a couple of years to read through and learn and reflect to the people of Yorkton and the people in the surrounding areas, policy that grew, and it evolved, Mr. Speaker.

It's a living document talking to people around the province and hearing what they wanted and conveying our ideas and developing the policy that eventually lead to the evolution of our platform, Mr. Speaker — our election platform, our plans for the province, our promises that we made, and promises that we plan and will keep, Mr. Speaker.

And from our platform became the Throne Speech. Our Throne Speech delivered admittedly not a big surprise to anybody in the province because it was derived directly from our platform — promises we kept — verifying in the Throne Speech what we said we wanted to do during election. We intended to keep those promises.

And that developed, Mr. Speaker, into our budget, delivered by our honourable and very, very capable Finance minister. And what were the messages of that budget, Mr. Speaker? Well I'll tell you the messages of that budget. Our budget is to carry out our plans, Mr. Speaker, by first of all keeping our promises to the people of the province, preparing for the growth that is inevitable.

You know, granted, the province was growing; things were starting to move along fairly well. But, Mr. Speaker, I can honestly tell you I had people calling me from out of the province the night of the election and past, since the election, pretty much in tears, Mr. Speaker, so happy that there's been a change of government, a change of attitude in this province. And they're starting to move back. We were growing slowly but we can just see the momentum picking up and growing. We just can't even hold them back, Mr. Speaker. They're just coming into the province at a fast rate.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, Yorkton — although it's a problem, I guess, in some ways is good to have — is growing at such a rate, you know. There's talk of subdivisions expanding. The city can't keep up with lot development. They're very happy with the one part of our plans, our budget — the \$300 million interest-free tax, interest-free loans for property development in the province, Mr. Speaker, for municipalities. And Yorkton fully intends to use that program, Mr. Speaker, in developing lots for the growth, not only for our residents but our commercial and our industry.

We're just on the verge of expansion around Yorkton and not only in the known things — the canola plants and the things of that nature, Mr. Speaker — but value-added and resource development and you name it, industry, manufacturing. People are very excited to come around, come to the Yorkton area. In fact some of our businesses from the area, Mr. Speaker, are growing at such a rate they're winning awards left, right, and

centre.

At a recent Celebrate Success Awards, I had the opportunity to stand in this House and do a member's statement a couple of weeks ago. Very booming agricultural businesses, Mr. Speaker, industrial businesses serving the industrial sector, manufacturing, the value-added, the list goes on and on. Yorkton's a place to be, a place to do business, and you know, we're proud to have them come to our fair city.

And, Mr. Speaker, in stating that we're going to keep with our promises and sustain the momentum, we are preparing for that anticipated growth. We're ensuring that all Saskatchewan people do benefit from the growth. And, Mr. Speaker, on that I'd like to say — it's maybe been said a few times in this House, and different ways — but you know, we are, as the Saskatchewan Party government, we're looking to the future. We've got both hands on the steering wheel, and we're looking forward through the windshield, Mr. Speaker. We're looking to the future. We're looking to what's coming, and we're preparing. And we got a nice firm grip on that steering wheel. We're going to have control of this and manage this growth. And we're going to be, you know, very responsible for the people of the province.

We are not doing what the previous administration did, Mr. Speaker. The previous administration drove with their left wrist casually on that steering wheel, their right arm folded around the seat back, gazing out the back window, just out of control willy-nilly, Mr. Speaker, and just out of control. But we're, we're managing that a little bit better, I think, Mr. Speaker. Just willy-nilly.

An Hon. Member: — Just willy-nilly.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Willy-nilly. We are blessed, Mr. Speaker. We're blessed with natural resources in this province that not only other provinces, other provinces in our Dominion, you know, many states in the United States would, would just do just about anything for, Mr. Speaker. There's countries in the world that go to war over any one of our resources, let alone what we do have in this province, something we're truly proud of and we should be using for the benefit of all people in the province — not hoarding, not keeping for ourselves till some day in the future that those resources become worth a little bit less, and we're stuck with not taking advantage of the opportunity that the Lord has given us here.

So you know, it's very proactive, Mr. Speaker. We're trying to be proactive and not reactive in this government, which has been kind of the state of affairs in the previous administration for years.

As it's been said a few times tonight, Mr. Speaker, but it's got to be said again, we're leading in many areas. We're leading in retail sales and international exports — number one in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Value of our building permits, housing starts — number one in Canada, Mr. Speaker. Population growth — guess what? Most growth in 30 years, Mr. Speaker. In fact experts from outside of our province predict Saskatchewan will jump to the very top of economic growth in 2008 — number one again, Mr. Speaker. We have more people working in this province, our province of Saskatchewan, than ever before —

something we can all be very proud of, whether opposition or government, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, more than any other province in Canada, Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan, with its solid economic fundamentals, is well positioned to ride out the storm, a view taken not by people within this government, not necessarily people within the province, but people, economic experts from United States and around the world, Mr. Speaker, realize Saskatchewan's position to weather storms that other provinces and maybe the countries around us won't be able to handle, Mr. Speaker. But we're poised to do that because of what we're blessed with.

And that being said, Mr. Speaker, you know, we do, we are facing challenges. We have seen jurisdictions around us face challenges with their growth. Other jurisdictions have run into a lot of trouble with the way they have grown and the way they managed their growth. But we have to learn, Mr. Speaker, from their experience — good and bad — we have to learn from other's experience. We can learn from our neighbours, you know, maybe cutting a lot and doing things to pay down their budget in too quickly a matter, not doing things in a balanced approach with debt reduction and growth of the province. Mr. Speaker, we're going to balance that approach. We are going to pay down our debt in a responsible manner as well as make sure that we have what we need to grow the province in a sustainable manner.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, we are ready for growth. Saskatchewan, I believe, is ready for growth. This government is ready for growth. But let us state as well tonight, Mr. Speaker, that our infrastructure system is not; we have a failing infrastructure system in the province. You know, we have schools that are built in the '40s, '50s, and '60s that are substandard and they needed either renovation or replacement. We have hospital and health facilities, Mr. Speaker, in the same predicament. They are crumbling. They are needing upgrading and updating and renewal. Roofs that are leaking, as my esteemed colleague from Saskatoon Northwest has said and, you know, he's an awfully tough act to follow, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to do my best here.

Roads and highways crumbling. The Minister of Highways doing an excellent job with his plans and his infrastructure investment, planning of \$408 million. And I think, as he has stated already too, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, the people of Saskatchewan are going to be upset this year, not with the state of the highways but the delays in the construction of our highways that they'll have to put up with. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that's something they're willing to put up with.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, many years our province has been very reactive, but now we have to make a big investment in our future for sure, a 1 billion dollar investment. It's time to be proactive. We have to invest now. We are ready for growth, Mr. Speaker. The largest capital investment in Saskatchewan is coming — \$1 billion. That's right — \$1 billion in investment in our infrastructure — 1 billion, 1 billion, \$1 billion.

An Hon. Member: — Largest, you say.

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Largest investment in our infrastructure in history — investments in our hospitals, our highways, our

schools, and in fact in our families and our children in that respect. Mr. Speaker, \$191 in hospitals for facilities, buildings, medical and safety equipment. In fact, Mr. Speaker, my home constituency of Yorkton is already benefited to the tune of \$1.3 million, Mr. Speaker, in Yorkton, an announcement we're very happy to make in Yorkton not that very long ago.

Over \$160 million on upgrades for repairs in schools. I'm sorry to the Minister of Education, the Deputy Premier; I have to let the cat out of the bag before he has a chance to stand and speak. But I'll let some of this news as well out, but he can reiterate that when it's his turn, Mr. Speaker. And he'll speak to that in detail I'm very sure.

As I said, over \$400 million in highways, roads — very important, Mr. Speaker — our economic corridors, our corridors connecting our economic areas in our province, Mr. Speaker.

You know, we realize Regina and Saskatoon are major economic corridors. And something I will not let anybody forget is Yorkton — the third largest trading area in the province, the third largest health region in the province — and I'm very happy that my government is investing in my home constituency in a reasonable and timely manner. We'd always like more but, Mr. Speaker, you know, I'm very happy with what we have coming. And they're looking to Yorkton and know the value of our home in Yorkton.

Mr. Speaker, as well I'd like to speak a bit about Yorkton being that third largest trading area. If you do look at the map of the province, we have Saskatoon in the centre and Regina kind of in the south centre. Yorkton is serving a trading area, a huge trading area, Mr. Speaker, covering a good chunk of Manitoba. We go all the way up to the bush line of Preeceville; highest, Norquay area; we go way over to the west quite a ways, you know, halfway to Saskatoon pretty much our trading area goes; all the way down to Fort Qu'Appelle area. A huge trading area, Mr. Speaker.

Yorkton is serving a large area with health care, with retail, with recreational, with industry, Mr. Speaker, with jobs, people travelling. You know, coming to Regina this morning, I realized how many people we had commuting from the Melville area and from south of Melville, Mr. Speaker, to Yorkton for jobs.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, with our investment in roads and highways in the rural areas, with the possibility of economic development in the rural areas, those people, Mr. Speaker, they won't have to travel to Yorkton. They'll have economic development in their own cities, their own towns.

We already see growth around Yorkton where small-town communities, little communities around Yorkton, where they were thought to be dying or dead, Mr. Speaker, now you can't buy a lot. Little places like Willowbrook, little places like Ebenezer, Rhein, Theodore, Springside, Wroxton — Mr. Speaker, you name it — these places are starting to . . . they're pretty much out of lots. They may need some of those low-interest loans to develop lots for those communities as well, Mr. Speaker, because we have bedroom communities flourishing around Yorkton right now because of the

development coming to our city and just spilling out, Mr. Speaker, just spilling into the surrounding communities, and it's very great to see.

I'm so happy to be from that area and representing that area along with my colleagues from Canora-Pelly, the Deputy Premier; and my colleague from Kelvington-Wadena, the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs; and my colleague from Melville-Saltcoats, the Minister of Agriculture — three excellent colleagues surrounding the community of Yorkton, the constituency of Yorkton. I couldn't be happier to have such excellent neighbours for support and all of us working together for the greater good of all of our communities and for the province, along with the leadership of our very Hon. Premier from Swift Current. My seatmate, I can't go without talking about my seatmate from Saskatoon Northwest, the man that keeps me on the straight and narrow and keeps me anchored over here, feeding me information.

[22:00]

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about keeping our promises, something I've touched on already. But we are keeping our promises. We've already carried through a lot of promises, Mr. Speaker. We've carried through a fixed election date, smaller cabinet, stronger balanced budget legislation. That's already known. We've already stopped the provincial sales tax on used cars.

Something I'm very excited about personally, Mr. Speaker — and I'll have a chance to maybe speak about that a little bit tomorrow as well — is providing extra care for our cancer patients, access to drugs that will prolong their lives and ease their pain, Mr. Speaker. I've been a strong advocate of cancer treatment and cancer care for the past dozen or so years, and I'm very excited to see that, Mr. Speaker.

As well, there's added investment in cancer care; I believe it's \$10 million in extra cancer care for our cancer patients in the province, Mr. Speaker — something that warms my heart and tells me that, you know, I am truly stating facts when I say that our party is a free enterprise party, Mr. Speaker, but we have a very strong social conscience.

Some other things we've carried through with making our streets and highways . . . through stiffer penalties for drunk drivers. And it just goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

Many of my colleagues tonight have spoken about shortfalls of the former administration, and you know we can beat that dog to death, so I'm not going to go there any further. I'm going to focus on the positives . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well okay, Mr. Speaker, we'll get to a few of them over time.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Ottenbreit: — My wife is here; I'll give her a show.

You know what I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to . . . Well no, let's talk about some of our social conscience of our party, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm just going to run through a list here . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I am rubber; you are glue.

Some of our social policies, Mr. Speaker. We're committed to ensuring the people of Saskatchewan benefit to our growing economy. That includes our people that need help, Mr. Speaker. Our budget provides for the most support for the most vulnerable in our society.

Something very close to my heart, Mr. Speaker — my years of CBO [community-based organization] experience and work — an extra \$5 million for food banks and community-based organizations, Mr. Speaker . . . We realize our CBOs, our community-based organizations, are essential. They're efficient, effective modes of delivery of services, and you know we have to support them. And they're delivering great life skills and job training.

As well, Mr. Speaker, our government has provided \$3.3 million extra dollars for increases in salaries and operating costs for those same community-based organizations. Our capital budget for Social Services is . . . our capital budget, that's right, Mr. Speaker, for in the Social Services department this year, \$5 million, increase of \$3.1 million, 165 per cent increase, Mr. Speaker. 3.2 million for implementation of the child family service case management IT system, so we can track our children that are needing help in the system, Mr. Speaker. We won't lose them.

Our budget also commits to something I've been delegated to do by our Hon. Premier . . . is half a million dollars in one-time funding to host a summit of our community-based organizations in 2008, something that will happen this June, Mr. Speaker. And they're going to help us. The front line is going to have input. Our front-line CBOs are going to have input in the development of our social policy for our government. We're going to listen to them, Mr. Speaker, and they're going to help us in the direction we go with our social programming.

\$1.1 million in new funding to transition houses and sexual assault centres, Mr. Speaker. 5.1 million for an additional 88 drug-addiction beds, Mr. Speaker, something the former administration talked about doing and never did carry through with, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Saskatoon Northwest pointed out, that you know, not one bed was opened under Project Hope; 88 beds will be opened shortly, Mr. Speaker. \$298.5 million in total funding for income assistance programs, that includes a 1.1 million for rental housing supplements.

We also are doubling our caregiver tax credit to \$8,190; doubles the infirm dependant tax credit to \$8,190, Mr. Speaker; increases the disability supplement tax credit, \$8,190. All these are double, Mr. Speaker. 2.9 million — a 2.3 per cent increase for approximately 300 of our community-based organizations. We're going to provide 2.4 million to support our growing caseload of individuals with intellectual disabilities accessing residential day programs, Mr. Speaker. The budget also provides \$400,000 increase — up to 1.9 million — for the disability housing supplement.

We're building safer communities for children also, Mr. Speaker, providing 5 million for 30 additional child protection caseworkers, 30 permanency placement planners. The list goes on, Mr. Speaker. Preparing for future growth, we're allocating 50.6 million in federal funding, providing for the affordable housing program for Aboriginal housing program. The budget

also provides 60 million for the provincial neighbourhood revitalization housing initiative which targets the inner cities, Mr. Speaker — something my colleague from Saskatoon Northwest spoke of — in major urban centres and northern communities, Mr. Speaker.

I want to breeze through some other promises, Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, in fact I think my time is coming to a close. We touched on the 40 promises here, I think, over and over. I don't know if we've touched on all tonight here through the different colleagues going through this list, but it's a very thick list. People can, you know, go to our website on the Internet and check things out . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . I am very happy. I couldn't be more happier. Coming through with that many promises in our first four months since our election, Mr. Speaker, and as that interviewer said, he's just amazed, totally amazed at how we could come up with such a good budget, how our colleagues — our Finance minister and cabinet — come up with such a good budget and carry through so many promises in such a short time, promises that our Premier made and we're keeping, Mr. Speaker.

So with that, I'm not going to support the amendment brought forward by the opposition, but I'd be more that honoured — very honoured, Mr. Speaker — to support my government's '09-08 budget brought forward by our Finance minister. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — I'm very pleased tonight to enter in the budget debate. And I'd like to start by giving credit to the Finance minister and those who worked with him in preparing their first budget.

We on this side who had the opportunity of being in government understand the difficulty there in the job of preparing a budget in a relatively short period of time. The budget was prepared in about half the regular amount of time, and, Mr. Speaker, we want to acknowledge that. We want to acknowledge the hard work by the Finance minister and others enabled to do that.

Mr. Speaker, we believe in giving credit where credit is due. And, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the Finance minister for during his speech, he gave credit to the members on this side and the former government for doing many good things that put a foundation in place for the budget which he presented. And, Mr. Speaker, we appreciate that.

Many members opposite have taken the opportunity to say everything was terrible, terrible, terrible when they formed government. But, Mr. Speaker, using a baseball analogy, the province was doing terrific. Things were going really well in this province over the last couple of years. Things have been progressively getting better. And, Mr. Speaker, they inherited a province where they were on third base. But to hear them talk about the situation, you'd think they'd hit a triple instead of inheriting a province being on third base.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is the 15th balanced budget acknowledged by the Finance minister and acknowledged by the members opposite. There is some irony in the fact though that, Mr. Speaker, over the last 14 balanced budgets they said they were all not balanced but when they formed the government, all 15 budgets were balanced. We do thank the Minister of Finance for acknowledging that. We think that to his credit he stepped up to the plate and acknowledged the situation as it was.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to give credit to the Finance minister for understanding once he became Finance minister the need for a Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, regardless what you want to call it, this province has needed a Fiscal Stabilization Fund because of the volatility of its resource revenues. And, Mr. Speaker, give credit to the Finance minister for understanding that was a necessity and continuing a Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, that's in stark contrast to where the current government, when they were in opposition, portrayed the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. They said it wasn't needed. It wasn't required. We should never have such a fund. But, Mr. Speaker, they have such a fund.

Mr. Speaker, the day that they formed government, the day the members opposite formed government, they spoke of the province's finances being stark. The situation was dire. Everything was falling apart. Just a few, few months later, Mr. Speaker, they're going and talking about how great the province is and how much money is there. Well, Mr. Speaker, they inherited \$1.3 billion — \$1.3 billion. And, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, that was the fiscal situation of the province. It's nice the Finance minister acknowledged that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about our province and our economy. Mr. Speaker, we're a have province, and we're proud to be a have province, and we should all be proud to be a have province. Mr. Speaker, we're a province that . . . because of our own initiative, not because of any initiatives from other provinces or from the federal government, we're a have province. The business people, the entrepreneurs, and the investors of this province worked hard. They worked hard with government — and with the opposition — but with government to make this province a have province, and we should all be very, very proud of that. And, Mr. Speaker, we need to work hard to keep this province a have province. We need to continue to work hard to make this province the very best it can be.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a number of things that would have made that easier. Mr. Speaker, I want to start with equalization. I want to talk about the promise made by the federal government. Even though we're a have province, Mr. Speaker, much of our revenue comes from resource revenues, one-time resource revenues. Once they're used up, won't be there any more, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, just think what we could do if we had that equalization money, equal to about \$800 million a year, and we're able to put it away in a fund for our future when, Mr. Speaker, we won't have those one-time renewable resources available to us. That day will come.

The issue of renewable resources and the ownership of provinces has been a long-standing issue. But most importantly, Mr. Speaker, we had a promise. The people of Saskatchewan received a promise from the federal government. And our

promise was, Mr. Speaker, the promise was that we would get 100 per cent of our non-renewable resource revenues. And, Mr. Speaker, they didn't keep that promise. And as a result Saskatchewan people have \$800 million less approximately each year.

It says so in their own budget, Mr. Speaker, in the budget that this government tabled for all the people of Saskatchewan. And if we had that money and we put that money aside, Mr. Speaker, we could build a heritage fund that would allow us to continue into the future being a prosperous and a have province regardless if there were significant downturns in resource revenues. And we need to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that we do what we can to build a future for our children.

Mr. Speaker, we saw this year a budget with a 10 per cent year over year increase. Mr. Speaker, a significant increase. And I'd like to point out that we haven't seen a significant tax decrease for the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, we tabled several budgets with far less increases year over year with significant tax decreases for the people of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker — significant tax decreases for the people of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, it is a significant disappointment to the people of this province that we didn't see a significant tax decrease in this budget. It's a disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, we had a promise from the government when they were running in this election, Mr. Speaker, when they were in the election, Mr. Speaker, they promised a significant property tax cut. And, Mr. Speaker, what did urban taxpayers see as a significant property tax cut? Two per cent, Mr. Speaker. It amounts to about 22 to \$30 a year, Mr. Speaker — 22 to \$30 a year. That doesn't buy you a pizza today, Mr. Speaker. That's their significant tax cut. It doesn't amount to what a pizza costs you today

[22:15]

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the government thinks that we can do with a pizza rebate. And that's what I'd like to refer it to as the pizza rebate because it doesn't even buy you a pizza, Mr. Speaker. And I'll tell you, my constituents, my constituents expected more. My constituents wanted more and they didn't get it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have members opposite chirping that they didn't get that from us. Well I'll just remind them that we gave a 2 per cent PST cut just the year before. A 2 per cent PST cut, Mr. Speaker, and that added up to significantly more than the pizza rebate, Mr. Speaker. That added up to several hundred dollars back for the average family. Not a pizza rebate of less than \$30, Mr. Speaker. Now, Mr. Speaker, we got a pizza rebate this year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if they had come forward with a meaningful tax cut on property, if they'd gone the full 10 per cent in year 1, this would have been a much better budget. And it would have shared the wealth among all the citizens of the province, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a pizza rebate doesn't do it.

Mr. Speaker, there were several other shortcomings in this budget. And I'd like to talk about this budget and some of its shortcomings. Now, Mr. Speaker, I've also talked about many,

many good things in this budget because there are many good things in this budget as well. But this budget fell short in a number of areas. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget fell short in the area of housing.

Today we are experiencing a very significant housing crunch in our province, both in availability and in actual cost, Mr. Speaker. There is a problem with availability in major urban areas as well as smaller urban areas across the province, Mr. Speaker. But there is also an affordability issue. And that affordability issue is accentuated depending on the size of the community. And, Mr. Speaker, it's an issue that is not addressed. Mind you, it is an issue that developed over a relatively short period of time in the last 12 to 14, 18 months. But, Mr. Speaker, it still needs to be addressed.

And, Mr. Speaker, we need to address the issue of affordability in housing. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I am pleased with the Minister of Social Services, that she continued and they funded the changes that we made, that we made to affordability in housing for those on assistance. And I also would like to acknowledge that the minister acknowledges that, and we do appreciate that she did acknowledge it.

Mr. Speaker, but there is still a significant gap in affordability for people. The problem is even greater than it was six months ago. And, Mr. Speaker, we saw no new funding to deal with that affordability gap for those most vulnerable in our society. Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to ensure that those who are the most vulnerable in our society continue, continue to be able to meet their basic needs.

And, Mr. Speaker, one of the other shortcomings of this budget was we saw no increase, no increase in income assistance for those on assistance in our province. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the outcomes of a hot economy, one of the outcomes of a very vibrant economy is increased costs. Whether or not we like it or not, part of a hot economy is increased living costs. Everything from food to housing to utilities — all go up when you have a hot economy. And, Mr. Speaker, there's nothing to increase the funding for those who are on assistance in our province in this budget, Mr. Speaker. It leaves them even more vulnerable. And this budget doesn't address that issue. And, Mr. Speaker, those who are most vulnerable are going to feel more vulnerable as a result of this budget. And that is one of the shortcomings of this budget.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other shortcomings of this budget is training seats. We have a very, very hot labour market, and as a result of an extremely hot labour market, Mr. Speaker, we have the need to increase significantly our training capacity for young people in our province. We need to take full advantage of the opportunities that our young Aboriginal population presents for this province.

And, Mr. Speaker, I will acknowledge there's been an increase of some training seats — and that's appreciated; it's good — but we need more. And, Mr. Speaker, we need about double that. And that's what was in last year's budget, about 2,000 training seats, Mr. Speaker — 2,300 in the 2007-08 budget. Now, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, we need to acknowledge that our hot economy, our wealth that this province now experiences, requires us to examine some of these issues very,

very carefully. And, Mr. Speaker, in the area of the most vulnerable in housing and assistance rates, in the area of training seats, we fell short.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about one more area where I think there is significant shortfall. And that's the environment, Mr. Speaker. When you have the level of economic wealth, you know economic growth that we have in this province, we have an increased responsibility, increased responsibility to ensure that growth is environmentally sustainable and that we do it in a manner that leaves our province and our country in as good if not better condition for our children than it is today. And, Mr. Speaker, we need, we need to ensure that what we do economically is environmentally sustainable. And, Mr. Speaker, there is just not enough emphasis in this budget about environmental sustainability, about climate change and about meeting our needs as a province to leave the province that we have environmentally sound for our children. And, Mr. Speaker, we need to emphasize the environment to a greater degree as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to talk about the amazing last five weeks of 2007. Now we are hearing statistics today about 2007 that we knew were going to be there by the end of the year: population growth, great economic growth. We're seeing increased sales. We're seeing increased activity, increased investments.

Mr. Speaker, that was throughout all of 2007. And, Mr. Speaker, we knew that we would have, by the end of 2007, well surpassed the \$1 million mark. We knew that we would have economic growth that would lead the nation. And, Mr. Speaker, we should all be proud of that. But, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite would do well to acknowledge that that took a significant amount of work over all 12 months, just not the last five weeks after the election.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about some of the good things in the budget. I want to talk about some of the positive things that are going on in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the continuation of the tuition freeze. That tuition freeze is important to young people. It's important to students that are going to post-secondary education. And, Mr. Speaker, we'll give them credit for continuing the tuition freeze that we had in place for a number of years. We think it's a good step and it is a positive step for young people. And I believe you have to acknowledge those things that are positive.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk about the increased infrastructure budget — the capital budget, the \$1 billion they talk about. Now, Mr. Speaker, nobody in this province, including the members on this side, are going to say the \$1 billion towards infrastructure isn't (a) good and (b) important because, Mr. Speaker, budgets are about delivering things to the people of the province.

And, Mr. Speaker, we have today, we have today an unprecedented economic situation. We hear about the last 16 years all the time. But members opposite should acknowledge that the last 16 years haven't had the economic realities and possibilities of today. Mr. Speaker, it was about building the

foundation so that we could have the economic reality of today. And, Mr. Speaker, we worked hard, the business people and the citizens of this province worked hard to build the foundation to allow for the economic reality of today. It isn't the members opposite or the members on this side that do that; it's the entire population of the province of Saskatchewan that had to make choices, had to make sacrifices in order to build that economic potential and possibility.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about, I'd like to talk about this budget, and I'd like to talk about some of the positive enhancements, Mr. Speaker. It's very difficult because I can't hear myself speak, let alone deal with the issue, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That seems that things have quietened down a little bit; now I can at least hear myself speak. I hope that members opposite had the opportunity because I'm talking about good things in their budget.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Minister of Social Services for continuing the funding for foster care and the improvements to foster care. Those were initiatives that became very problematic in the latter part of last year, and we moved on and we're very pleased that you're continuing that funding. Mr. Speaker, that funding goes to help vulnerable children in our society. And when we had the opportunity to move forward with that with the money in the latter half of last year, we were extremely pleased with what those outcomes would mean for foster families and foster children, and we're very pleased to see it carried on today.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to now take a couple of minutes to talk about some of the things in the budget that we're very disappointed in and some of the things that weren't clear to the people of Saskatchewan as the budget was delivered and things that we are just starting to become aware of and some of the implications. Station 20 in Saskatoon is one example. That was a community-driven initiative. It was driven by the people of Saskatoon and the people from the community that were going to benefit from the projects, going to benefit from the initiative put forward by the community. Mr. Speaker, to have the funding pulled is . . . without having consultation of the community and those involved, the funding was simply pulled, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they should go back and take the opportunity to meet with those community leaders that were responsible for the Station 20 project and understand from those community leaders what the community needs, what the community wants, and why that project was so important to the community. Mr. Speaker, I would ask them to take the opportunity to go back and meet with the community. Talk to those community leaders because that project was important to those people. It's important to the community and important to those neighbourhoods.

Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to work with the community as we plan, and this is clearly one case where the government didn't take the time to consult with the community. He didn't take the time to talk to community leaders in those projects about the importance of the project, and we urged him to do that.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at this budget . . . as I said earlier there are many good things in this budget. This budget, it's been referred to by many of my colleagues as NDP lite or NDP like. And, Mr. Speaker, there are many, many initiatives here that build on the exact budget of a year ago. And, Mr. Speaker, that's normal. It is normal to continue programs and continue to enhance them, and continue the second- or third-year phase-in of programs. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget does a great deal of that. And we do appreciate the fact that the government continues to build on previous budgets because that's normally how it is done.

And, Mr. Speaker, there are many things here that would have been done in this budget — that are in this budget — would have been done whether we were the government or the Sask Party was the government. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why people on this side refer to it as an NDP lite or NDP like budget in many ways. And, Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that, with only some shortcomings, is a very good budget, but there are significant issues that need to be dealt with. And those significant issues should be addressed by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I just quickly would like to recap what those issues are. Mr. Speaker, it's the property tax relief. With the economic situation this province is in, the taxpayers of Saskatchewan should have been afforded the full implementation of the property tax relief. Mr. Speaker, there needed to be something there to address the cost of affordable and accessible housing, particularly for those most vulnerable in our society, Mr. Speaker. And that should have been coupled with, Mr. Speaker, some enhancement to the basic benefits afforded to those who are most vulnerable in our society.

Mr. Speaker, we needed to see a greater increase in training seats to meet our needs. Mr. Speaker, we were looking to see at least the same number as last year, about double that was brought forward in this budget. And, Mr. Speaker, lastly, Mr. Speaker, we needed to see some enhancement to the environmental protection of our province, Mr. Speaker. And if those four things had been in there, Mr. Speaker, I think you would have seen a unanimous support for the budget.

But because they're not there, Mr. Speaker, because they're not there, Mr. Speaker, people — citizens of our province who are vulnerable, the most vulnerable in our society, Mr. Speaker — are left out. And, Mr. Speaker, ordinary families are left out because there's no meaningful tax break for them. Mr. Speaker, the citizens of this province feel that they didn't get, they didn't get what they believed they should get. And, Mr. Speaker, that's at a time where we have \$1.3 billion, \$1.3 billion left in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund. And, Mr. Speaker, it's at a time when we have a \$250 million surplus going to pay down debt. Mr. Speaker, it is affordable to make the changes that would be good for the people of the province. It can be done in this budget, Mr. Speaker. They can make the improvements if they want to. And, Mr. Speaker, they should make those improvements.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Being 10:30, the time of adjournment, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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