



SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

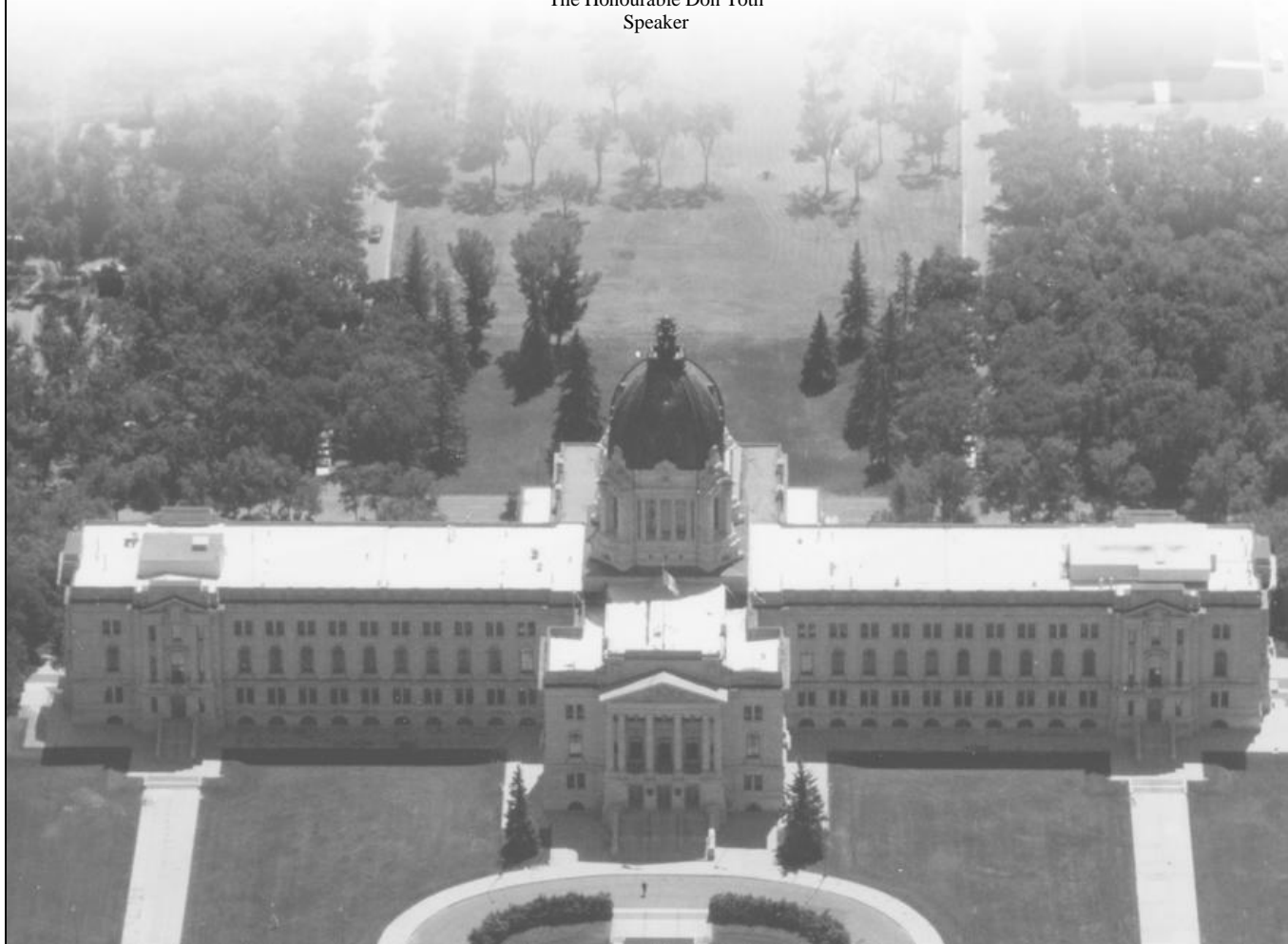
of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(HANSARD)

Published under the
authority of
The Honourable Don Toth
Speaker



MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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

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

[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 Deputy Speaker: — The time being 7 p.m., this House is now in session. Government orders, special order. I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and participate in the budget debate. Usually when people do these things, they usually give a little bit of background about what's been happening in their constituency or in their personal life. I did that at some length with the Speech from the Throne, but I would like to give you a brief update on both my mother and my mother-in-law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my mother is now 88 years old and is in relatively good health. And I think when you reach that age, you don't need to be as sensitive as you might be when you were younger, and she often has a good way of keeping her children humble. We were over there for a supper a week or so ago. And I was complaining that every time the newspaper put my picture in the paper that it was usually with my mouth open or usually not looking what I thought particularly appropriate. And I was complaining that these pictures were not really flattering. And she listens, and I'm not sure how much she always hears because sometimes she doesn't have her hearing . . . [inaudible] . . . She just turns and she says, I've seen them; they're quite flattering, I think.

So anyway my mother-in-law is a great . . . [inaudible] . . . and is able to keep me humble as far as how I look. My mother-in-law, sort of as to how I sound, my mother-in-law mentioned the other day that she saw me on television. And I asked my mother-in-law, did I sound like I know what I was talking about? And she said, I don't know; I just pressed mute. So I sort of realized that things have different priorities for different folks.

My mother-in-law lives in Rosetown and is a wonderful person, one of the nicest people I know. And to the little bit of chagrin of my wife, she has now developed a romance. And not so much the fact that she's developed a romance that causes my wife concern; I think it's the fact that my mother-in-law's dating a now retired lawyer. So she's seeing Morley Asselstine, a retired Rosetown lawyer and a fine gentlemen. And I would like to say hello to them with your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to make some

comments before I sort of go into what I want to say about the budget. I've listened to the members opposite talk about this budget. And I heard the member this afternoon, just before we broke for supper, ask the question, why don't you ask yourselves if you're better off now than you were 16 months ago. I can understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, somebody on this side of the House asking that question and asking it with a lot of pride and enthusiasm. But when the members over there ask that question, I sort of have the Dr. Phil question: what are you thinking? How's that working for you?

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 16 months ago, we were talking about elections, election speeches. And the election slogan at that time was hope beats fear. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we've now gone past hope beats fear. Hope is now giving way to pride and confidence and people taking an enormous amount of passion about this province.

This is a wonderful place, and people here are realizing it and are incredibly thankful to be living in the great province of Saskatchewan. And that pride and that enthusiasm is now growing and that confidence is growing throughout the business community. We should all be happy. I listened, Mr. Speaker, and I've been listening on the radio to the global meltdown, to the collapse, and what's happening in the rest of the financial market. And I've been watching what's been happening with the AIG [American International Group, Inc.], and I've listened to some of the members opposite and frankly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if those people worked for AIG they wouldn't even get a bonus.

In any event, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and enter into the budget debate. I'm proud to be part of a government that is keeping its promises and making life more affordable for Saskatchewan people. Mr. Speaker, the budget presented last week by the Minister of Finance keeps money in the pockets of ordinary people across our province. This budget will reduce education property taxes by \$103 million in the coming year. That is the largest education property tax cut in the history of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Overall this government is putting more than \$700 million back in the hands of Saskatchewan people this year. I'd like to give you just a few examples. In 2009 a single person earning \$25,000 a year will pay 35 per cent less in provincial taxes than they did in 2007, and that does not include the property tax relief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 2007, before the Saskatchewan Party was elected, a family with an income of \$50,000 paid more than \$3,300 in provincial tax. This year that family will pay only about \$1,300, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a reduction of some 61 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the world economy is in deep trouble. So far Saskatchewan has managed much better than many other parts of this country. Some might say we got lucky, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but building a strong economy doesn't have much to do with luck. It's a matter of sound management and prudent planning. This budget is designed to keep Saskatchewan's economy strong and steady despite the current global crisis. It is a balanced budget at a time when other

provinces are running deficits — not just small deficits, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but some of them are running huge, massive deficits.

In addition to the largest education property tax cut ever, this budget delivers nearly \$170 million for municipal infrastructure. That is in addition to the \$1 billion announced in the ready-for-growth plan and the \$500 million economic booster shot announced last month. This budget provides new operating grants for municipalities, increased funding for agriculture, new child welfare initiatives — something that's close to my heart as Minister of Justice — and funding for safer communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like now to turn to the budget for my own Ministry of Justice and Attorney General. I want to thank some of my key staff, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In my own office, I've got some wonderful people working for me. I've got Jean Watts, Michelle Chyz, Lara Zaluski, Judy Langford. And today is her birthday so I want to say happy 42nd birthday for her. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's not appropriate to say ages, but I will. And of course, my chief of staff, Denise Batters.

I have some people working in the ministry that I would like to mention as well. I have some new people, and I want to recognize one person who has retired. Al Dwyer had for 35 years worked in various aspects of the ministry. He started in 1973 in the budget bureau in Finance. He moved to Consumer and Commercial Affairs in 1975 as director of administration. He became the acting deputy superintendent of insurance in 1989, and in 1990 was named director of the consumer protection branch. He retired earlier this year. Mr. Dwyer had worked for the Saskatchewan government for some 35 years and was one of the main pillars of my ministry.

He has now been replaced by Eric Greene, a new person who has come on board, and I'm pleased to say he is doing very well and is going to be a great asset to the ministry.

In the preparation of the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had some great assistance from Gord Sisson, who is the executive director of corporate services, and I thank him for that.

We are now dealing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with some issues of courts' capital and expansions and new courthouses — one in Meadow Lake and an expansion in the Court of Queen's Bench in Saskatoon. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that courthouse in Meadow Lake, I'm pleased to say that the contractors are working well through the winter months. It's going to be a wonderful addition to the community of Meadow Lake. I want to recognize the member from Meadow Lake, who lobbied hard and effectively to get that courthouse, and we're very, very pleased that that courthouse is going forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also would like to thank Linda Bogard who is the director of court services, who has seen to it that all of those pieces came together when we were doing all of the expansion and everything else that is taking place.

We've also gone through a lot of work with new legislation and work that we've done to try and ensure that this House is ready to go ahead with legislation, and I would like to thank and recognize Susan Amrud who is the executive director of the

public law division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to recognize at this time my constituency assistant, Rita Flaman Jarrett. I think earlier in the fall I had mentioned her son, Brennan Jarrett, who was struggling with cancer. Sadly, on December 23 of last year, he lost his struggle. And it's, Mr. Speaker, my hope that her faith will give her and her family the strength that they will need as they face this terrible ordeal. It's something that is the worst thing a parent can face.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the capital budget of my ministry is over \$22 million. We are making substantial investments in new and expanded courthouse facilities so that everyone who uses the courthouse can do so safely and have access to the facilities that they need.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing one and half million dollars this year in the first phase of replacing the maintenance enforcement office computer system. I cannot exaggerate how much custodial parents appreciate the work of our maintenance enforcement staff. I'm pleased that they will be getting the up-to-date tools they need to have so that they can do their jobs well.

In a joint initiative with the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, we will begin work on the replacement of the courts' and corrections' computer system.

We will also expand video conferencing facilities for courts. This is a program that saves time and money for the court system, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it can come through in the face of unexpected events. Just recently, Mr. Speaker, a court party was unable to reach all of the communities they were scheduled to visit because of bad weather. They did make it to a courthouse equipped with video conferencing however, and a judge conducted court via video link. Cases that otherwise would have been postponed have been able to be dealt with on schedule.

Those are the highlights of our capital budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we are also making other investments as well. As you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this government will be funding 30 more new police officers this year as we work towards our goal of 120 new police officers by 2012.

With additional police officers, comes additional pressure on the courts. That is why we are adding three new prosecutors to help deal with the additional caseload, and to crack down on violent crime. We are also investing \$270,000 for an additional judge and deputy sheriff to increase the availability of court time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Justice will be taking on some programs previously administered through the Ministry of Social Services. Details are currently being communicated to the community-based organizations that provide those services.

Our belief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that family violence programs, sexual assault centres, and transition shelters fit very well with existing programs that Justice administers now, such as victim services. Our intention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to offer well coordinated services that meet the needs of victims of

violent crime.

Additionally we are increasing funding for community-based organization operations budgets by 3 per cent.

With the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, we will begin implementation of the seizure process set out in *The Seizure of Criminal Property Act*. This allows the seizure of property that is an instrument of crime or has become the proceeds of crime.

Additionally our fine collection program will be enhanced with an investment of over \$200,000, and a program will be developed to better assist victims of crime collect money owed to them by offenders through restitution orders. As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission will become a special operating agency which will enhance enforcement and compliance activities. A well regulated financial system is essential if we are wanting to continue to grow our province's economy, especially in times of global crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to some of the items this budget offers in my home city of Saskatoon. As MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] for Saskatoon Southeast, I am truly proud that this government is investing \$200 million over two years for a new children's hospital in Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, this government will invest nearly \$100 million in a new bridge running across the south part of Saskatoon, right across the bottom boundary of my constituency — Mr. Speaker, something that's long overdue and much needed and something that was done in co-operation with the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon will also receive funding for MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] renovations. Oliver Lodge long-term care facility will receive \$4.7 million for capital improvements. The Saskatoon Police Service will be able to hire four new officers including an additional officer to help track high-risk offenders.

We will also be investing \$5 million towards renovation and expansion of the Queen's Bench Court House in Saskatoon. This, I might add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the first stage of planning for a significant improvement and expansion in that courthouse.

The government is investing \$23.3 million to accelerate twinning on Highway 11, to complete twinning from Saskatoon to Prince Albert in four years. And I understand there's been some additional top-up from the federal government. We are also contributing \$15 million to create 400 new on-campus resident spaces at the University of Saskatchewan. And I cannot fail to mention once again the funding for the new south bridge, Mr. Speaker. Saskatoon is the city of bridges and we definitely need this one.

[19:15]

Mr. Speaker, the opposition would have people believe that this

government is spending our province into a hole. Members of the opposition have called this budget runaway spending. On several occasions last week, the media asked what items they would cut from the budget, what things they would not speak. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they couldn't come up with a single thing that they didn't want to spend on or that they wouldn't do. They didn't remove a single thing. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I call on those members opposite to vote for and support this budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, in the previous year, this government has paid down the provincial debt by some 40 per cent. No one can say that this government is not fiscally prudent, careful, cautious in handling the money of this province in a very appropriate and careful manner. The members opposite would not only be well-advised to vote for this budget; they should be proud to vote for this budget. This budget should pass, Mr. Deputy Speaker, unanimously.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, to talk for just a moment about the members opposite, on CTV [Canadian Television Network Ltd.] news recently, one opposition member stated, "Well I think some of the government's initiatives are good initiatives in terms of property tax reduction."

The opposition has questioned our economic forecasts, particularly in relation to potash royalties. Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to insult anyone, so let me just say there are some people on that side of the House who need a course on how the royalty structure works.

The opposition have derided this budget, Mr. Speaker. They have raised the spectre of a previous provincial government and forecast a terrible future for Saskatchewan based on a balanced budget, and a balanced budget in the previous year that not only was balanced but also paid down a substantial amount of debt — debt that was incurred under that administration — and in addition to that made major commitments to capital.

Mr. Speaker, they have not presented any alternative, reasonable or otherwise, and I can only conclude that they are going through the motions of opposing this budget that in their hearts they know this is a prudent, forward-thinking budget. And once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would urge them to do the right thing and vote for it.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — This is a budget that will help Saskatchewan weather the economic storm. This is a budget that invests in much-needed infrastructure and capital projects. This is a budget that will make life more affordable for Saskatchewan people. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support this budget. I will not be supporting the amendment, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to choose optimism, hope, courage, and strength over pessimism and decline. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the Minister for CIC [Crown Investments Corporation of Saskatchewan].

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise in this House and to respond to the budget, and it's especially a pleasure to follow my colleague and good friend, the member from Saskatoon Southeast, who gave us a lot of good food for thought here as far as we look towards the budget. The 2009-2010 budget is indeed an historic document.

I'd like to begin by thanking those individuals that help me do my job each and every day. I'll begin with my wife, Trish, and she takes on a large part of the parenting responsibilities when I'm here in Regina. She has a tremendous, she does it . . . all of them. That's what members on this side of the House say, and I'd have to agree with them about that.

It's a tremendous load making sure that kids do their homework, get to music lessons, and indeed take part in the many activities that they do. My children, Carter and Paige — Carter is 11; Paige is 9 — and I thank them for always listening to mom and dad, and just because you're watching tonight, doesn't mean that you can't get your homework done. That's no excuse. The report cards were very good, and that's something that makes parents very proud.

I also want to thank those individuals that make my job easier during the day: my fantastic constituency assistant, Beth Epp; my super chief of staff, Marlin; and the fabulous four in my Regina office, Karen, Jacquie, Luanne, and Tamarha. Thank you all for all that you do each and every day.

It's a real privilege to listen to the concerns of my constituents and to represent the people of Saskatoon Silver Springs. Saskatoon Silver Springs is a growing part of our province. It's an area that has welcomed many immigrants to Saskatchewan. It's an area that welcomes those that want to make Saskatchewan their home. Neighbourhoods like Willowgrove are growing very quickly, filling up very fast. It won't be long before we're welcoming residents to the new neighbourhood of Evergreen in Saskatoon as well.

Mr. Speaker, this budget speaks volumes of where Saskatchewan is today. It speaks volumes of the attitude of today's government. This budget belongs to and is an investment in the future of the great province of the people of Saskatchewan. As MLAs, my colleagues and I have had the honour and privilege to represent the views of the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, our Premier, the Premier of Saskatchewan, is a true leader. Our Premier reminds us regularly not to lose touch with the people that elected us to serve. Our Premier believes that everyone deserves to be listened to and everyone's hopes and dreams are important. He reminds us what we all witnessed in November 2007 what happens to a government that fails to listen, Mr. Speaker. And I trust that the opposition members will be comfortable in their seats for a long period of time.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for doing a stellar job in reflecting the hopes and dreams of the people of Saskatchewan in this current budget. This however

shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, as he accomplished almost the same level of excellence as he did in last year's budget by going forward this year and surpassing last year's accomplishments.

I want to acknowledge and congratulate two other people that were key to this budget: the Deputy Premier, the member for Canora-Pelly; and the MLA for Rosetown-Elrose.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier and the MLA for Rosetown-Elrose have worked tirelessly for over a year on the property tax election promise — the promise that was to increase rebates and by year four to have a long-term solution to the property tax question.

Mr. Speaker, our government has kept the promise of a long-term solution on the education portion of property tax, and it did it two and a half years early, Mr. Speaker. It is particularly meaningful work with a group of government colleagues who feel as I do, that it is important not only to listen to the people of Saskatchewan but also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to listen to their concerns and to act upon it.

We have not only listened, Mr. Deputy Speaker; we have also delivered. On March 18 our government presented a budget titled *Saskatchewan: Strong and Steady*. And, Mr. Speaker, that's indeed what this budget is — strong and steady. Unlike the provinces that are experiencing economic decline, Saskatchewan is experiencing economic growth. While other provinces in the country are presenting deficit budgets, here in Saskatchewan we not only presented a balanced budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker; we have presented a budget that has a surplus of \$424.5 million.

While we've maintained a balanced budget, we have also announced major commitments to the people of Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is addressed again in this budget in a historic fashion, both on the GRF [General Revenue Fund] side, Mr. Speaker, and through the Crown corporations.

Last Friday, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of announcing that our government, through the Crown Investments Corporation, will not take a dividend payment from SaskPower in 2009. The money is being reinvested in SaskPower's infrastructure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the previous government chose to hold off on necessary infrastructure upgrades. This has led to the same infrastructure deficit in the Crown corporations that we have seen in our highways, in our schools, in our hospitals in this province, Mr. Speaker. The previous government neglected aging equipment in order to fulfill a commitment to keep the lowest cost bundle. I understand the desire to keep costs down. No one wants to see costs increase, but we all know what happened when our roads were neglected for many, many years.

The same is true for power generation and distribution in our province. A responsible government makes the infrastructure investment necessary to ensure that people have safe, reliable, and sustainable power at the lowest possible costs. In order to make that investment, SaskPower needs capital. Mr. Deputy

Speaker, this government is showing a true commitment to our Crown corporations by delivering the capital that they need.

Mr. Speaker, we campaigned on many promises, most that we have already delivered on. Over 100 promises made, over 100 promises kept in 16 short months in government, Mr. Speaker. Something that I and all members on this side of the House are very proud of.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — One promise was to correct the property tax system in Saskatchewan that has long been ignored. I am proud to say our budget delivers the largest property tax cut in Saskatchewan history.

Under this new system, the province will cut and cap, cut and cap, Mr. Speaker, education property tax rates for each of the three major property classes — residential, commercial, and something that members opposite never even thought to do, agricultural. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this property tax cut totals \$103 million in education property tax savings for Saskatchewan property owners in 2009, a 14 per cent reduction across the board. And, Mr. Speaker, I will say it again: this represents the largest education property tax cut in a single year in the province's history. A promise made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a promise kept.

As well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$53 million in further education property tax savings for next year. The people of Saskatoon Silver Springs will save approximately 10 per cent on the education portion of property taxes in 2009 as a result, as a direct result, of this budget. And they will pay even less, Mr. Speaker, next year. By 2010 the savings will be about 16 per cent. And if you consider the rebates that we've offered in 2008, the Saskatoon Silver Springs residents will be approximately 26 per cent better off.

Now, Mr. Speaker, members of this House, specifically the member from Saskatoon Nutana, is complaining that the property tax will be increasing in Saskatoon. In reality, even with the increase in assessment that has taken place in our city, the education portion of property tax will still be decreasing. This means not only will property owners in my constituency of Saskatoon Silver Springs pay less in education tax, it applies to the vast majority of property owners in Saskatchewan.

Not only did we announce the largest property tax cut in Saskatchewan history, we also announced, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government is increasing its share of funding to school divisions by \$241 million this year to a record \$990.5 million. Something to be proud of, something that all members on this side of the House and all members who vote in favour of this budget will be very proud of.

The province will now fund 63 per cent of the operating costs of pre-kindergarten to grade 12 education, up from last year's funding of 51 per cent — increasing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to 66 per cent next year. It doesn't stop there. \$23.5 million to enable universities to limit tuition increases to an average of 3 per cent. \$23 million to attract and retain nurses and other hard-to-recruit health care professionals in Saskatchewan. \$7.5 million to continue training seat expansions announced last year for

nurses, physicians, and medical diagnostics.

Mr. Speaker, this is what a government that listens and cares for the people of Saskatchewan does. We don't make up promises and then make up excuses why we can't follow through on them, Mr. Speaker. We make promises we have every intention of keeping and then, Mr. Speaker, we keep them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend considerable time discussing another plank in this historic budget — a \$200 million commitment for the new provincial children's hospital in Saskatoon.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — The announcement of the new children's hospital in Saskatoon is fantastic not only for Saskatoon, but for the entire province of Saskatchewan. Our children won't have to travel to other provinces to get the health care they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, a group of individuals have worked tirelessly for years to make this dream a reality, and if you will bear with me for a moment, I want to publicly thank them. The Children's Health & Hospital Foundation board of directors consists of the following people: Brynn Boback-Lane, CHHF [Children's Health & Hospital Foundation] president and CEO [chief executive officer]; Bryan Richards from the Yanke Group of Companies, the Chair of the board of directors; Jim Yuel from PIC Investment Group; Rod Bell from McFaull Consulting; Marsha Martin from Paul Martin Communications; David Katzman, principal, John Lake School; Joe Vidal, Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation; Dr. Bill Bingham, RUH [Royal University Hospital] department of pediatrics; Dr. Shirley D.D. Maltman, family physician; Debra Wieggers, Wieggers Financial and Benefits; Mr. Grant Kook, Golden Opportunities Fund and Chair of the board, SaskTel; Gene Gerspacher, Bioriginal Food and Science Corp.; Lyle Chutskoff, TD Canada Trust; Dr. Laurentiu Givelichian, RUH department of pediatrics; Robert Hawkins, University of Regina; and Jean Morrison, Saskatoon Health Region.

Ladies and gentlemen, a group of people that need congratulations, that need to be thanked for their tireless effort over the last 10 years.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[19:30]

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, Ms. Brynn Boback-Lane, the CHHF president, CEO, had this to say about the budget:

It's going to make a world of difference in the pediatric health-care environment. It'll be family focused and [all] about the children and their unique needs.

Saskatoon Health Region CEO Maura Davies said:

We're just thrilled. We've been waiting for this day for a long time and I think the people of this province have been [as well].

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Davies even said on that day in the legislative rotunda that it's not often that she wants to hug a minister of Health but today she wanted to do it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health sits in front of me. There's often times that I've witnessed his eloquence in this House, but I don't think I've ever wanted to hug him. But I tell you he's done work, and I tell you in the days that we saw this announcement there were many tears, there were many cheers when the Finance minister stood up and talked about this announcement.

And, Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, this announcement goes beyond politics. It's not about the Sask Party. It's not about the NDP [New Democratic Party]. It's why we are here — to make this place a better province. It's about why we come to this wonderful institution and do the work we do.

Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, the Children's Health & Hospital Foundation started being very vocal about the need. In 2003 I had the opportunity to bring petitions to this legislature. At that time I heard members talk about the doubt that they had, that this would be duplication. I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that members were against the hospital; they just didn't understand fully the need.

In 2005, our 100th anniversary of our province, the Saskatchewan Party came out with a document entitled 100 new ideas for a new century. This was a forward, responsible looking document. It was one that talked about many ideas that the Saskatchewan Party had in opposition, and right there, right out front was a commitment to a provincial children's hospital in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was frustrating to hear, year after year, people would say that Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island were the only jurisdictions in Canada that didn't have a children's hospital. We took no pride in that comment whatsoever, Mr. Speaker. Something we wanted to change very quickly when we were in opposition and something we did change very quickly when we became government.

Within 16 months of assuming office, we made the necessary \$200 million commitment. No corners were cut, Mr. Deputy Speaker — an amount sufficient enough to build a children's hospital that we can all be proud of. I know that one day, once this hospital is built, it will specialize in a certain area, and probably welcome children from across the country that will come to Saskatchewan for that special medical care that they need.

Mr. Speaker, that's why we work so hard in Saskatchewan to grow our economy, to encourage more people to move here, to encourage immigration, to encourage the students to stay in our province — so we can afford a better health care system, a better quality of life. So that we can fulfill the promises that are important to our standard of living in our province, so we can indeed build a children's hospital.

Mr. Speaker, this budget benefits everyone in our province. There are too many investments to name them all, but I want to highlight a few: \$57.8 million for early learning and child care spaces; \$24.9 million for the first instalment of a multi-year

strategy to make improvements in the child welfare system; \$18 million for the active families benefit; \$1.6 million to hire 30 additional police officers, consistent with the election commitment for 120 new officers over the four-year period. I know my seatmate, the member from Prince Albert Carlton, has worked very hard to ensure that we not only meet but exceed that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, \$1 billion capital programs to schools, hospitals, roads, and other infrastructure to make sure that infrastructure deficits in this province are a thing of the past, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, we promised to keep life affordable for everyone, which is why our government will begin an ambitious project to renovate government-subsidized rental housing. And we're building on our promise to help senior citizens by increasing the monthly support to help them cover rising costs.

Mr. Speaker, and I don't want to overlook municipal revenue sharing. We announced that there would be \$167.4 million in operating grants for municipalities. This is in addition to a \$100 million infrastructure booster shot for municipalities announced in February.

We said we would announce a new revenue-sharing deal that would provide municipalities with funding tied to our own-source revenue. Mr. Speaker, we have indeed kept that promise. The new municipal operating grant will provide funding equal to 90 per cent of one point of the PST [provincial sales tax] this year, and it will be 100 per cent next year. This will provide a reliable and predictable revenue stream for municipalities which will help them plan for the future. It will help them plan for the long term.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again this shows we are listening. We are listening to SARM [Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities]. We are listening to SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association]. We are listening to the people of Saskatchewan. And, Mr. Speaker, here's what the people of Saskatchewan are saying, and I quote:

We asked for predictability. We asked for an increase, something that was tied to growth. That's exactly what we got. We didn't get 100 per cent [this year] but we got a promise that we'll get that next year. We're extremely happy with that.

City of Saskatoon comptroller, Kerry Tarasoff.

Mr. Speaker, Alan Thomorat, CEO of the Canadian Homebuilders Association, had this to say, and I quote:

“The Provincial Government is fostering job creation that will benefit our families and our communities, as well as contribute to the future economic growth of our province for generations to come. Ensuring that all people in Saskatchewan have access to quality careers will help sustain the economic momentum that our province is experiencing . . . These investments into our province not only support and encourage . . . growth, they contribute to

a strong housing industry and a sustainable housing market as well” . . .

Mr. Speaker, we have been listening to the people of Saskatchewan. We have been listening to what the people want. And through this budget, in the city of Saskatoon as well as across the province, there are many examples of how people have done well in this budget.

NewsTalk Radio reported, and I quote:

Saskatoon’s mayor Don Atchison is very happy with the numbers and initiatives announced today. Mr. Atchison went on to say it’s “. . . been a huge step, truly monumental in the sense of provincial government acknowledging what cities have been asking for and so this has been very, very good news for us.”

Don Atchison, mayor of Saskatoon, March 18, 2009.

Again to quote:

Atchison also says the \$200 million announced for the new Saskatoon children’s hospital will be a huge benefit to many, many families.

Another quote, Mr. Speaker, from the Saskatoon police chief, Clive Weighill:

The Saskatoon Police Service will deploy . . . [more officers] this year to deal with the city’s most dangerous . . . [criminals] thanks to a bump in funding in the provincial . . . [government].

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Weighill went on to say:

“We’re very pleased . . . We . . . have a growing population . . . in our community, so we want to make sure that we have the resources to keep an eye on what’s going on.”

Mr. Speaker, my home city, the city of Saskatoon, has done very well in this budget. Saskatoon has done very well indeed by this Saskatchewan Party government.

I just want to highlight some of the things that have happened in Saskatoon in 16 short months. I’ve spoken already about the \$200 million for the children’s hospital; \$23.3 million to accelerate twinning of Highway 11, completing the twinning from Saskatoon to Prince Albert in four years; \$15.7 million for the international vaccine centre at the University of Saskatchewan; \$5 million towards a \$27 million total cost of the renovation, expansion Saskatoon Queen Bench’s Court House.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. There’s many, many areas that I would like to talk about. We can talk about the extra funding for the Queen Elizabeth power plant that I had the chance to announce a few days ago. \$15 million for 400 new on-campus residence spaces at the University of Saskatchewan. That was a great announcement, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was fantastic to be there to join the Minister of Social Services, to join the Minister of Advanced Education, to talk about

something that was long overdue. The need was there for a long period of time, and we certainly have addressed it.

I’d like to go on and on, but in order to give everyone an opportunity to talk about this historic budget, I will just leave it for another speech at another time.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking to constituents, and whether it’s in the coffee shops throughout Silver Springs, in the grocery stores, at the hockey rinks, at the soccer centres, there’s one thing that, a common theme that people have told me. They’ve said, your government, our government, the Saskatchewan Party government has the fortitude to make decisions, and we’re getting things done. Not only do we talk about ideas and goals and set the goals that we want going forward, we also, we also have the ability to make those decisions in a quick and concise manner.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to refer to the title of the budget again, *Saskatchewan: Strong and Steady*. This title encompasses what we delivered in the 2009-2010 budget. Today our government has set a course, a strong and steady course, for Saskatchewan. We’ll stay strong and steady through the meaningful tax reductions, the largest education property tax reduction in Saskatchewan history.

We’ll stay strong and steady through meaningful infrastructure projects which keep our province working and keep our economy moving forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We’ll stay strong and steady through meaningful investments in all Saskatchewan people, Mr. Speaker, in families and students, in children and seniors, in First Nations and Métis people, in those from rural, and in those from urban Saskatchewan.

I want to end with a quote from a news release from the Canadian Homebuilders Association. And I quote:

The Canadian Homebuilders Association — Saskatchewan commends the Provincial Government for their foresight and initiative in providing property tax relief which will benefit . . . Saskatchewan residents who wish to work and remain in our province, or move to Saskatchewan to enjoy our wonderful quality of life. The Association applauds the Provincial Government for the support and efforts to address housing needs in our province and looks forward to increased partnership with the Government of Saskatchewan so that we continue building homes, building communities, and building our province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this has indeed been a ringing endorsement for the Minister of Finance. It’s been a ringing endorsement for members on this side of the House and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it’s been a strong and steady beacon for those who call Saskatchewan home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’ll be voting in favour of the budget. I’ll be voting against the amendment. And I thank you for this opportunity to address the budget today.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from

Saskatoon Massey Place.

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to stand tonight and be able to enter into the debate on the budget, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to speak this evening. I often do get the chance, Mr. Speaker, to have the opportunity to speak in the legislature, something that I know every MLA enjoys and truly does see as a privilege.

But I think too often in the busyness of the day, the busyness of the months as they go by, we forget to pause and thank those that support us and truly do contribute in very meaningful ways in terms of how we as MLAs end up in this legislature, Mr. Speaker.

On that note, I would like to take a moment to thank my wife, Ruth, who is a wonderful person, very strong and supportive and kind — someone who's not overly partisan most of the time but someone who is guided by common sense and who I truly rely on.

I also want to thank my family, Mr. Speaker, my parents and my siblings. I'm very fortunate to be in a family that I like, and they like me most of the time. And also with my brothers-in-law, also my in-laws as well — a great group of people who I really do value.

[19:45]

I was very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, when I was elected, to in a sense inherit the existing constituency assistant that had been serving Massey Place for some time. And I would like to say thank you to Donna Rederburg who is the daily face of who I am in the constituency so often, as constituents come in and seek assistance and guidance on issues. And she serves them so well in a very patient and knowledgeable way.

I also want to thank Ruben, Bev, and Keli — casual constituency assistants who help out from time to time when we need their assistance.

Friends are also a very important part for anyone in political life, Mr. Speaker. And I want to take a moment to thank my good friend, Linsay Martens, who provides me with a lot of support, guidance, friendship, and advice, and someone whose comments I truly do appreciate and treasure.

Last group I'd like to thank, Mr. Speaker, are the constituents of Saskatoon Massey Place, some who are my neighbours and friends and others who I know only through being an MLA. I've truly enjoyed being a Member of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and having the opportunity to get to know these individuals better. And I look forward to working with them for many years to come, I hope.

Looking at the budget, Mr. Speaker, I'd first, before I get into some specifics, I'd like to talk about some of what I see as the troubling signs around this budget, Mr. Speaker.

I know that in a time of global economic uncertainty, the constituents of Saskatoon Massey Place want to know that there is a government on their side and working for them. And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, my constituents are not reassured of

that at this point in time.

What we've seen in this budget, Mr. Speaker, is an emphasis and a focus for short-term gain with what I see, Mr. Speaker, as potential long-term pain. When we look at the approach that the Sask Party government has taken on this budget, there are a number of concerning aspects to this budget, as I would see it, that I know in speaking with constituents and speaking with people outside of my constituency, there's been a number of concerns that they've voiced to me in what they have seen in this budget that we're discussing tonight.

The one aspect, the first aspect I'd like to speak about, Mr. Speaker, is growth projections that I see as overly optimistic. And, Mr. Speaker, it's not my opinion alone on this matter; it's really the opinion of many people in Saskatchewan and in Canada.

If we look at the growth projections that the Sask Party government used for this budget, we see a Ministry of Finance projection, Mr. Speaker, of 2.1 per cent growth for 2009. So 2.1 per cent, Ministry of Finance, Mr. Speaker. So we ask ourselves, well this is what the ministry's estimate is, and there are certainly many talented individuals working in the ministry, Mr. Speaker, and they provide a great deal of good advice.

It's important though, Mr. Speaker, to always balance one group's opinion with other individuals'. And in this instance, Mr. Speaker, I think it would be appropriate to look at what the private sector average is; their projection for growth during the same period of time. And for this what we see, Mr. Speaker, is that the private sector average of eight institutions is 1.0 per cent. So we see a difference right away of more than double as to what the average of the private sector institutions are saying.

At the time that the budget was developed and this document was developed, Mr. Speaker, events in the world continued to unfold on a daily basis, and changes continued to happen. Since the point in time where the average from the eight private institutions was taken, Mr. Speaker, of 1.0 per cent growth, there have actually been revised projections for growth by these eight institutions. And that revised amount as of March 18, Mr. Speaker, was 0.63 per cent.

So what we see is a revised private sector average of 0.63 per cent, and we see the Sask Party basing growth projections for the economy based on 2.1 per cent, more than three times higher than what the most recent private sector average would indicate as being an appropriate approach for going forward. So this is one of the first troubling aspects, Mr. Speaker, that I see about the budget.

Coupled with the aspect of what I see as overly optimistic growth projections, we see spending going up considerably, Mr. Speaker. We see spending in this budget going up 12.4 per cent. Twelve point four per cent in this proposed budget combined with 10 per cent in the previous budget, Mr. Speaker, is a pattern that I know many people, in speaking with them, have voiced to me some questions about the sustainability of that approach.

In voicing those concerns, those same individuals used examples from our province's past when there have been

administrations that have pursued that type of spending at the same time when we're experiencing concerns about growth projections. And it's a deadly combination, Mr. Speaker.

So we've looked at the overly optimistic growth projections of the government, using projections three times higher than the private sector average. We've looked at spending, which was 10 per cent increase last year and 12.4 per cent in this budget. What we also see is debt increasing by nearly \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, and clearly taking on that kind of debt has serious implications for the province in the years to come, something that needs to be considered.

We see public debt increase by 36 per cent over the next four years. So when we're looking at the aspects of the budget, I think it's very useful and helpful to keep these initial points in mind.

With the increased spending that we have seen, Mr. Speaker, this pattern over the last couple of years, it is curious when looking at many of the projections for spending increases that have been suggested by the Sask Party in years past, this is a deviation from remarks that were earlier made. In many ways, Mr. Speaker, not unlike what we've seen in other parts of the country where we've seen the federal government with the Harper Conservatives, where they have in recent months gone away from positions that they have held for many, many years, Mr. Speaker, leaving many to wonder, what are the core principles operating in the party? What is the guiding measure that the government is using at the point in time? Leaving many to scratch their heads wondering if in fact the government has the best interests of the people, of the province, and the country in mind.

In ignoring what I see, Mr. Speaker, as reliable projections by the eight private sector institutions, Mr. Speaker, by disregarding those numbers and that average and instead relying on one average that is out of sync with what the majority of private sector individuals are saying, so relying on the private sector is certainly an approach that the Sask Party does not criticize in general. They can understand the merit of relying on more individuals with coming from different backgrounds.

But this ability to suspend advice, suspend advice that they are receiving and to not pay attention to it, Mr. Speaker, reminded me of another parallel with the Harper Conservatives when we saw the complete denial, Mr. Speaker, of Minister Flaherty in admitting that the economic situation in Canada was troubling, that there were problems, that we were going to be affected by happenings around the world but to the south of us as well, Mr. Speaker. It was to me a parallel and a similar situation, that where we see an ignoring of private sector averages for projected growth. So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of what I see as the troubling points about the budget.

In a time of global economic uncertainty, Mr. Speaker, I was listening to a science documentary a few months ago in the car as I was driving down to Regina on some given day. And this science documentary was talking about an island in the South Pacific, a beautiful location with beautiful resources, clean water, many positive things going for it, with a good group of people living on the island.

Despite, Mr. Speaker, the good resources that it had and the beautiful location and the many things going for it, Mr. Speaker, what they've been experiencing on this island over the past years is, because of the ocean currents, the garbage that ends up in the ocean, the position of this island is bringing a number of ocean currents and bringing the garbage on to the beaches of that island, Mr. Speaker. So while it is in many ways a paradise and has many things going for it, it now finds itself to be, its beaches filled with litter which is now contaminating the environment, affecting the wildlife.

In the past months, Mr. Speaker, we've heard the Sask Party talk about how Saskatchewan is an island and how we are an example for the rest of the world and, Mr. Speaker, there are certainly many true aspects about that. While, Mr. Speaker, we do not have coconuts and palm trees here in the province, we have beautiful prairie, we have pristine lakes, we have talented, quality people that live here and are building their lives.

In the same way though, Mr. Speaker, while we have many things going for us just like this small island in the South Pacific, we cannot ignore the fact that there are global currents at play that will have an influence and impact on where we live. It will have an impact, an influence on our economy, on our social environment, and certainly an influence on the happenings of this legislature. And my fear, Mr. Speaker, is that while there are certainly many great things going on in the province right now, and while we have been a place of great momentum, my fear, Mr. Speaker, is that the members opposite are not cognizant of the global currents that will inevitably have an influence in our province.

So when we look at when we're in a time of global economic uncertainty, Mr. Speaker, when we see the Fiscal Stabilization Fund — or whatever it was renamed by the Sask Party, the Growth and Financial Security Fund — when we see that a fund that was at about \$2 billion depleted to about \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, as these global currents are swirling around us, to me, Mr. Speaker, and to my constituents, that is a concerning issue. That at the same time as the ramping up of spending, one has to ask, one has to question as to whether or not the approach outlined is sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of this economic uncertainty, we've also seen some recent comments that would cause me to pause and wonder as well. I think it was last week or maybe earlier this week, when the Ag minister was commenting on the budget, and he used the expression open for business.

Well certainly on this side of the House no one can doubt the official opposition's commitment to growing a strong province and growing a strong economy in co-operation with the people of Saskatchewan. You can look at the implementation of the Vicq report and so many other examples. But that phrase, open for business, Mr. Speaker, harkened back to a time when I was not directly involved in politics, but was certainly paying attention.

And I know when we're talking about flags, that phrase brings back certain memories for the people in this province, to a time when advice from private sector forecasters was not heeded, a time when spending was being ramped up, Mr. Speaker, a time when the actions of government were not in fact in the best

interests of Saskatchewan people. So I found the use of that expression, Mr. Speaker, open for business, to be a little curious.

So, Mr. Speaker, I've talked about some of the initial troubling signs I see about this budget. I've talked about the current state of global economic uncertainty that we as Saskatchewan people find ourselves in.

Another area I'd like to talk about, Mr. Speaker, is the area where it affects perhaps the people of my constituency the most. And, Mr. Speaker, that's the area where sadly many of my constituents are paying more and getting less.

We can look at a number of examples. One example in coming off of one of the coldest and longest winters that we've had in this province for some time, Mr. Speaker, when furnaces were cranked up and houses were trying to be kept toasty warm, Mr. Speaker, we saw very expensive utility rates over this winter. And I know for many of my constituents that has been a problem. For them, what life under the Sask Party government has meant for them is the fact that they're paying more and getting less.

Mr. Speaker, to back up the experience of my constituents, we can look at what the daily from Thursday, March 19, 2009, states about the consumer price index in Saskatchewan. And it says, "Consumers in Saskatchewan paid 2.6% more on average in February . . ." The highest rate increase in the country, Mr. Speaker. And explaining why there was that increase, Mr. Speaker, it says, "In Saskatchewan, a major factor was a 22.4% rise in natural gas prices." So, Mr. Speaker, what we see, when it comes to utility rates and when it comes to how it affects Saskatchewan people, we see that they're paying more and getting less.

[20:00]

Mr. Speaker, we also see some proposed changes in this budget on the issue of fairness, what I see as a lack of fairness in property tax changes, Mr. Speaker. The changes that the Sask Party has brought in on property tax do not affect people in this province the same. And the member from Silver Springs was talking about this not too long ago, Mr. Speaker. But we can see how the proposed changes in this budget will affect people differently in different parts of the province, Mr. Speaker.

This example that this chart and table that I'm reading off of, Mr. Speaker, I pulled off of the ministry's own website this afternoon. Individuals who are watching at home are welcome to go to the ministry website, look at the PDF [portable document format] and see this for themselves, Mr. Speaker, and the name of the table is example of education property tax savings, Mr. Speaker.

So let's start with one of the first examples. The property is listed as Canora residential, so I believe this would be in the constituency of the Education minister, Mr. Speaker. The change in tax levy percentage for a Canora residential home, according to this sheet, Mr. Speaker, that is provided by the ministry, is a decrease of 48.0 per cent, 48.0 per cent on a residential home in Canora.

So let's continue looking at some examples here. We look at a Swift Current residential home in the Premier's constituency. It's not 48 per cent reduction, Mr. Speaker, but it's a 14.2 per cent. So not as high as Canora, but 14.2 per cent. When we look at the ministry's own chart that I pulled off of the website this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we see Saskatoon residential, a reduction of 3.3 per cent, Mr. Speaker. So not 48 per cent, not 14.2 per cent. According to the ministry's own chart that I took off the website this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, a reduction of 3.3 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, for my constituents, if you factor in the municipal increases that they may be experiencing this coming year, I'm not convinced, Mr. Speaker, that individuals will see a reduction in taxes. Moreover combined with aspects of reassessment — particularly as it affects individuals in Saskatoon Massey Place where we have seen an increase in value of homes compared to other neighbourhoods — we combine that, Mr. Speaker, reassessment with this, I'm not convinced that individuals will see a significant change. So clearly, in terms of paying more and getting less, when it comes to fairness and property tax changes, Mr. Speaker, not everyone — especially people in Saskatoon, especially people in Saskatoon Massey Place — not everyone is treated the same, Mr. Speaker. I know that is a concern for my constituents.

That affects individuals who are low income living in my constituency. That affects the many renters who, their rental rates are increased because of property tax changes. That affects seniors living on a fixed income, Mr. Speaker, who one time were perhaps able to buy the home because it was a much lower value. They've managed to maintain that home over the years, but now they're on a fixed income and they're struggling. Combined with paying more and getting less for the utilities that they've experienced over this winter, combined with an unfair application of property tax changes, Mr. Speaker, for many of them it means they're paying more and getting less.

If you're a single mother making less than \$25,000 per year, the government's intercity comparison indicates that you are worse off under this budget, Mr. Speaker. So these are some of the major and the larger issues that we've seen with this paying more and getting less theme.

There have been other examples, Mr. Speaker. We also see under this Sask Party government the issue of camping fees. Now someone might say, well that's a minor issue; it's not the most bread and butter issue. But, Mr. Speaker, people care about camping in this province. The fact, Mr. Speaker, that this Sask Party government would justify increases to their camping fees, and the minister using the most bizarre rationale imaginable, that somehow this would allow individuals in the province to appreciate their parks more, Mr. Speaker, I know to my constituents is more than puzzling.

But we've also heard discussions, Mr. Speaker, in terms of paying more and getting less, with the issue of the possibility of removing actual people, actual SaskTel operators for dealing with directory assistance, Mr. Speaker. It's sometimes these little issues, Mr. Speaker, that most annoy constituents. And I know many of my constituents are frustrated or are concerned about that prospect. For them, it's paying more and getting less service, Mr. Speaker, not to mention the important jobs here in

Saskatchewan.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, that is a current topic that we have been discussing in the news, there has been some discussion about an enhanced driver's licence. And the Sask Party, once they were, once it was identified that this was a problem, reversed their position, Mr. Speaker, but they were absolutely clearly going ahead down this path. They had spent over \$700,000 on this prospect, Mr. Speaker. More than kicking tires, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker. When you spend close to \$1 million on a plan, there was clearly an intent to implement it.

Mr. Speaker, think about in the same days as we have heard, we've heard announcements about HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] rates in the Aboriginal population in this province. When we've talked about overcrowding in the Westside Community Clinic, Mr. Speaker, think how far almost \$1 million would go in addressing some of those issues, Mr. Speaker. And instead what we see is the Sask Party reversing a policy once they, in a sense, once they are caught in going down a path that may not be appropriate for the people of Saskatchewan.

I want to touch on a couple areas of my critic duties, Mr. Speaker, where clearly individual students, constituents are paying more and getting less. We look at the area of tuition, Mr. Speaker. For many years, there's been a fully funded NDP tuition freeze in this province that's supported by students. We've seen a retreat from that position, Mr. Speaker. We've seen a decision by the members opposite to insist that students pay more for education. We see, on an average, a 3 per cent increase in tuition.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that 3 per cent — in the same way that property tax is being applied unevenly to people in this province — that 3 per cent is going to affect students in different ways. It might affect some, the 3 per cent. Others, Mr. Speaker, may be affected a lot more. Individuals in professional colleges might be dealing with increases far beyond 3 per cent. As individuals are looking at summer employment, looking on making arrangements for acquiring more debt to pay for a more expensive education, Mr. Speaker, they deserve to know how much their education is going up.

Another area with my critic duties, Mr. Speaker, is the grad retention program. What I've seen, Mr. Speaker, when the Sask Party brought in this program to replace the previous NDP grad tax exemption, we saw two serious blunders that the Sask Party made. First one was excluding people from out of province. They realized their error, Mr. Speaker, and they changed that program to expand it to all people. And now we see the Premier and the minister going out to other provinces and touting this plan — which was effectively doing the same thing that the NDP plan was already doing — as a great way and a great reason to come to the province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, when they go to other provinces, they need to tell the people that they're talking with to read the fine print, Mr. Speaker. Because if they're talking to certain people at job fairs in Toronto, if they're talking to a physiotherapist who has a master's degree, if they're talking to a nurse practitioner who has a master's degree, if they're talking to a recent M.B.A. [Master of Business Administration] graduate, Mr. Speaker,

those individuals will not get the rebate. The Premier and the minister need to be very clear when they're talking to people out of province that there is a problem. They need to fix the problem at home with their own program, and then they can shop it around if they think that's appropriate, Mr. Speaker.

It's a sad irony when we talk about our knowledge economy, when we talk about needing individuals to fuel our economy to provide much-needed services, to exclude some of the most talented and trained people from all over the country and from right here in Saskatchewan, to exclude those people from a program, Mr. Speaker. It is a sad irony and it is a mistake. And the Sask Party government needs to reverse that position.

As I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I want to once again thank the many, many people in Saskatoon Massey Place who over the past months have provided me with guidance and support — the people who are friends and the people who aren't friends but still provide me with guidance and advice along the way. I truly do appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

Because of the conversations and my relationships with these people, Mr. Speaker, I know that in times of economic uncertainty, my constituents want prudent and wise fiscal managers in government. Sadly what we see in this budget is runaway spending and overly optimistic projections — projections, Mr. Speaker, that are out of sync with the average of eight private sector institutions. That's concerning.

Given the nature of the times we live in, that causes me to be concerned and that causes individuals in Saskatoon Massey Place to be concerned. At the same time as spending is being ramped up, we see more and more expenses being forced on Saskatchewan people. We see uneven property tax with Saskatoon being treated unfairly, especially people in Saskatoon Massey Place. We see utility rates going up. We see Saskatchewan now having the highest rate of inflation. We see tuition fees being hiked. We see park fees being raised. We see a graduate retention program that continues to leave many people out.

Sadly we see the opposite of what our province needs right now. In times of global economic uncertainty, people want to know that their government is on their side and working for them. Mr. Speaker, that's my commitment to the good people of Saskatoon Massey Place. And because I'm on their side and working for them, I will not be supporting this budget.

This budget does not recognize the global economic uncertainty we find ourselves in, and it forces too many of my constituents to pay more and get less. For this reason, I will not be supporting the budget motion, but I will instead be supporting the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the member for Moose Jaw North.

Mr. Michelson: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is a pleasure to be here tonight to address some of the issues of the budget, especially in prime time. And now that we've got the new lights in here, it makes it a lot brighter, so the people at

home can enjoy this a lot more. But you know, Mr. Speaker, we really didn't need the lights to know that there's a lot more brightness on this side of the House than there is on that side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is a very important. It's a very worthwhile, a very good document. And I want to, I want to just comment and commend the people on this side of the House for the guidance that the caucus has done, the ministry that have put all this work into this document and made it what it is. And I want to especially thank the Minister of Finance who has put this together.

In fact the Minister of Finance and myself went to Moose Jaw this morning for a couple of presentations to the good people of Moose Jaw to just clarify some of the budgets. And the reports we got from the constituents of Moose Jaw and the people of Moose Jaw was, it was a very favourable document and a lot of good, positive comments.

When I look at the budget, Mr. Speaker, I can't help but think it's much like what the province was like when it was first becoming a province, a little better than 100 years ago, when the people came from all over the world to make Saskatchewan their home.

They were coming from a place where life wasn't as good, and they wanted to change what they had. They come with their dreams, Mr. Speaker, their determination, their enthusiasm, wanting a better life for them, for themselves, and their children. It was a new beginning, a new start, an opportunity — an opportunity to work and to grow and to realize the wealth of a new nation and a new province. It was a huge step for many of them, yet they could see a bright future. It was a new beginning and they didn't want to go back.

This is much like prior to the provincial election in 2007, when people wanted change from what they had. They had their dreams. They had — they were determined — their determination and enthusiasm. They wanted a better life for them and their children, a new start, a new beginning, an opportunity. And it was a huge step for many of them as they could see a bright, new future. It was a new beginning, and we're not going back.

No, Mr. Speaker, we're not going back. The people of Saskatchewan are enjoying richer and more fulfilling lives now than they did 16 months ago, and we're not going back. Mr. Speaker, there's more optimism in the province than there was 16 months ago, and we're not going back.

Just after the election I talked to some of the CBOs [community-based organization] and they sit down with me and they said, Warren, we need help here. We're sitting here and we're losing staff because we can't afford to pay them what the going rate is. We are forced to feed our people, the people that we're trying to look after, for \$4 and change a day to feed them. They weren't looked after, Mr. Speaker. This government looked after them and they adjusted the rates. And, Mr. Speaker, they don't want to go back.

Seniors are now being dignified after 16 years of neglect — seniors that have worked the land and have developed this

province in so many ways. They've put a lot into it. And with the senior income plan where we doubled the amount of money these seniors were getting. Mr. Speaker, they don't want to go back.

Our youth and our graduates in schools and secondary education institutions no longer have to leave this province for their future. But you know, Mr. Speaker, they are coming back. Our young people are now realizing that the opportunities are here. The benefits for a positive future can be attained right here in their home province.

[20:15]

This province is leading the nation in growth in all economic forecasts. Just last Wednesday, the wholesale trade numbers were released, and Saskatchewan had the highest percentage increase in the nation. From January 2009 compared to January 2008, we were up by 14 per cent on a seasonally adjusted basis. This was the highest increase among the provinces, surpassing the 7.8 decline reported for the rest of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, there are more investment opportunities for business and more employment opportunities in this province. The attitude for people is becoming more enthusiastic than it has been for decades. And, Mr. Speaker, we don't want to go back. We don't want to return to a poor attitude with doubtful thinking and a tired, old, negative government that had made poor, costly investments — costly investments like Navigata, \$43 million loss; SPUDCO [Saskatchewan Potato Utility Development Company], \$35 million loss; and Retx.com was \$26 million loss.

And yet we've got a member on the opposite side of the House from Massey Place, just before me, that said, and I quote, how far 1 million dollars could go. And he's talking about needle exchange. And that's the money that they lost in their . . . [inaudible] . . . Mr. Speaker, we don't want to go back to that.

In fact their record is a dismal record of bad decisions and poor judgment, millions of dollars lost in failed ventures with Saskatchewan people's money, and a mindset of fear. That's right, Mr. Speaker. Fear is really all what they had. And they attempted that in the last election. Yes, they did. And they haven't learned yet because they still think this fear factor is going to rejuvenate them. We're not going back there, Mr. Speaker.

They're saying revenue is unsustainable; it's unrealistic. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to suggest that those 20 people on the other side of the House, if they really think that the revenues are out that much, let's take their refund from the income tax that we have provided for the lower income tax and return it to the treasury if they're that . . .

When we did these estimates, we did it from the best estimates from the potash industry. We went around the province, and we went to industries all over and said, what are the forecasts? And this is what the best estimates were. And we can trust these people because this is their business. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the potash industry is investing, ready to invest 7 billion — \$7 billion in potash expansions in this province. We don't want to go back. This is a realistic government, Mr. Speaker. And if for

some reasons revenues didn't come up to what our expectations were, obviously we'd have to make some adjustments. But we're not going back there.

Our government has and is working hard for the people of this province. And the people of the province are seeing the positive results, and we're not going back. All of Canada is noticing this, Mr. Speaker. Saskatchewan is doing this on a balanced budget. And they're looking at us as the leaders — the leaders where we should be. We're leading in most economic sectors.

In fact just two weeks ago I was listening to the *Roy Green Show* — it's a national radio show through the Corus Radio network — and listed our Premier as, and I quote, “a bright, young, articulate politician that gets it.” And I thought that really hit the nail on the head, and that's going coast-to-coast. So there's a lot of respect for this province, a lot of respect for our Premier and what we're doing in this province.

Mr. Speaker, for Saskatchewan to grow economically, our infrastructure needed to be improved. Our government started to repair roads and highways to get products to markets and to get supplies to our farms and our village and our manufacturing plants. We needed road systems to get people to market centres and to schools and to hospitals. We needed schools to educate our children.

And it's funny, when we look at prioritizing the needs for repairing the schools, the one way you can do it is count the buckets in the hall when it rains to see which one needs it the most. That's how bad the infrastructure has been.

Mr. Speaker, we need a health system that looks at the needs of the sick, and the social system to care for the underprivileged.

Now we've got leadership. We've got foresight. We've got enthusiasm. And we've got positive thinking. This new government has . . . and provided a better living for all Saskatchewan people. And we don't want to go back, Mr. Speaker.

Through debt reduction paydown, we've paid \$2.6 billion. That's 40 per cent of the debt in one year, Mr. Speaker, saving millions of dollars in interest payments. And we're not going back there.

We've made historical tax cuts, the largest personal income tax cuts in provincial history. We're not going back. Enhancement of social programs by raising personal exemptions, increasing child tax credits. This government took 80,000 people off the tax roll, and we're not going back.

For those that have low-income jobs, we increased the Saskatchewan employment supplement as well as the income levels for those who qualify. And they don't want to go back. We've addressed shelter rates and rental supplements for low-income people in our province. We've doubled the seniors' income plan within the province, something that hadn't been looked for for 16 years, and those seniors don't want to go back.

Mr. Speaker, by doing more for the people, we're seeing population increases and strong employment, and Saskatchewan

is expected to continue leading the country in economic growth this year. It's a great time to be in Saskatchewan. So much has been improved in 16 short months, and we're not going back.

Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan is not immune to the economic turmoil. Fortunately this province is now positioned to withstand economic insecurities. This is being accomplished by investing in infrastructure, lowering taxes, and doing it with a balanced budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Michelson: — We're looking after the people of Saskatchewan. At a time when others are experiencing economic decline, we're forecasting economic growth. We're looking for workers and showing an increase in employment figures. And so, Mr. Speaker, we move on forwardly, optimistically but cautiously.

This budget is balanced with a forecast supplement of \$424 million while improving the benefits for Saskatchewan people.

After a record year of infrastructure investment, our government will dedicate another \$1 billion for infrastructure in schools, health care facilities, highways, agriculture, and affordable housing. At last after 60 years of property owners funding a disproportionate high share of education costs, a new solution is being implemented.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Michelson: — It has been said before but it's worth saying again, this is the largest education property tax cut in a single year in our province's history, and children are still going to receive proper education. In fact in my home constituency of Moose Jaw, we will receive anywhere from a 15 to 30 per cent discount in property taxes. And we're not going back.

At last a municipal revenue-sharing deal has been developed, something the municipalities have been asking for for years. And this is a huge benefit for municipalities, on top of the economic booster shot of \$108 per resident. The new revenue sharing will be tied to the province's own-source revenue.

We're supplying 30 more police officers. We're expanding and creating more spaces for those with disabilities. Additional funding for community-based organizations — \$27 million, Mr. Speaker. One thousand new child care spaces in Saskatchewan; \$12 million for programs and training for learning and child care workers. Twenty-three million dollars to enable universities to limit tuition increases. Training seats expansions for doctors and nurses. Supporting for farmers and ranchers — \$100 million to fully fund AgriStability and AgriInvest programs. A strong and steady Saskatchewan future keeping life affordable. And we're not going back.

Moose Jaw is another very aggressive community, which I'm very proud to reside in, Mr. Speaker. And we're keeping on moving. We recently passed a referendum that will clear the way for a brand new downtown multiplex. There's a substantial investment proposed for the revitalization of a development on River Street, as well as plans for Temple Gardens and other ideas of major development in Moose Jaw. The economic

booster shot will positively assist improvements to my city of Moose Jaw.

Mr. Speaker, the \$450,000 investment announced last week is taking the next step in upgrades to the Union Hospital. Now capital planning can take place. This funding will allow the Five Hills Health Region to look at options to address deficiencies and to determine what services the new facility would need to provide.

It would also address the scope and estimated cost with various potential options. The planning process will involve gathering information on service flows, population trends, and includes stakeholder discussions to determine services needed and facility requirements. From there additional planning will be completed on the facility layout, which includes site planning and facility design. The process will include research and assessment of the best practice in acute facility design.

By taking the necessary steps to do this important work, our government will ensure a state-of-the-art facility is designed for the people of the Five Hills Health Region.

Mr. Speaker, I've read the amendment. I've looked at it. I've studied it as hard as I could. And to me, the amendment is somewhat meaningless. The amendment lacks vision and lacks direction.

When I look at this budget, this budget provides more money for health care, more money for health professional training. It provides more money for municipalities and social programs and schools, more money for agriculture producers, and money in the pockets of the people of Saskatchewan. It's a budget designed to keep Saskatchewan's economy strong and steady.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this, I urge everyone in the House to grow Saskatchewan and to support the budget as presented. We don't want to go back. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McMillan): — I recognize the Minister of Highways.

Hon. Mr. Elhard: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand in my place tonight and participate in this budget debate. I'm seeing it's 8:30. I don't know, it's quite a number of months since I've had an opportunity to address the House on any topic, and I don't know how I'm possibly going to get all of this material into a 20-minute speech. But I'm going to try, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we've got some important things to say tonight, particularly as this budget affects the people of Saskatchewan, and more specifically how it benefits the people of Cypress Hills.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to reflect a little bit. I might be a bit nostalgic as I do this, but I went home for supper tonight — I live close enough in session that I can walk back and forth — and as I was coming back to this grand old building after a break at supertime, I was thinking about how very fortunate I am, how fortunate we are as individuals, to be able to participate in this type of activity in this great hall of tradition.

This building is a wonderful facility. It's got tremendous history, and there are only a very few of us, over the life of this province, that have had the benefit of standing in their places and addressing the issues of importance to the people of Saskatchewan. And for that reason we are blessed and fortunate.

And I had somebody comment the other day — I believe it was a constituent who actually came to the legislature for the budget presentation — when he commented again about the importance of this building, this institution to the democratic tradition of this great province. And I'm very pleased and proud to have been here now a decade. I can't believe how fast that time has flown, but it will be 10 years this June that I was first elected on behalf of the people of Cypress Hills to come here and represent their interests.

[20:30]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to recognize a few people tonight. I want to recognize the Minister of Finance and his staff and those who helped craft this budget. I want to recognize my colleagues because, you know, we are a family and we really enjoy each other's company. We spend a lot of time together and we work together. And I want to salute each of my colleagues who contributes in his or her own way to the success of the Saskatchewan Party government and to our daily achievements in this legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also just talk briefly about this budget, and then I'm going to go digress slightly and talk about my constituents and the people who I represent, and some people who work with me. But I want to say this at the outset about this budget. It lays the foundation for a bright and prosperous future for the people of Saskatchewan. It addresses age-old inequities in education funding by taking the property tax issue and the burden of that issue off of the individual property owners, and the onus now falls largely to the provincial government.

It addresses municipal revenue sharing which I think has been an issue for at least a decade, maybe longer, that we've had successive governments and successive administrations say that it needed to be attended to; something needed to be done to share our resources with the municipal sector. And it wasn't done until this budget, and I'm proud of that.

This budget produces fundamental tax relief for individuals, not just for the years ahead but in this instance retroactively, because it addresses tax relief for the year, the calendar year 2008, and that was achieved through the increase of personal exemptions. And people see the benefit of that retroactive application of that tax relief in their returns as they come back from Revenue Canada this spring.

This budget has addressed the needs of low-income citizens. It's addressed the needs of seniors in our province. It's also addressed in a dramatic way and a significant way the needs of disabled and the disadvantaged. We've got record spending on highways and other related infrastructure in this budget, and it's the highest single-year expenditure for agriculture and related programs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is many other things in this budget that we're going to talk about as the evening progresses. Many of my colleagues have already touched on a variety of topics, but that fact that agriculture has been addressed in such a significant way in this particular budget speaks volumes to the importance of agriculture to this government, this political party, and also our recognition of that industry as a very, very important player in our long-term economic success in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say a few things about my constituents. I have benefited tremendously, personally from the support of my constituents. I've had the privilege of running in four elections now and every year I've seen a little growth in the popular support, and that has been very gratifying. And I go home on weekends and I visit with friends and colleagues who surround me at coffee time, and we talk politics and we talk weather, we talk farming, we talk international issues. We cover a lot of ground. And I feel the support and the encouragement from my constituents in those times when we get together.

There is a very strong level of support for the initiatives of this government, as I can tell from the comments of my constituents. But I personally have felt their support at an increasingly greater level. That doesn't mean they always agree with me, but that means that they have been very outspoken in their recognition of my role on their behalf. And so I'm grateful for that, and I want to say so and put that on the record tonight.

There is one other group though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I want to specifically single out tonight. And this is a bit personal and sometimes it might be a bit difficult, but there's a group of people in my constituency who say to me, Wayne, I'm praying for you. You know, Mr. Speaker, that comment means an awful lot to me. It is a sustaining comment. It is an encouragement. It is a comment that gives vitality and life to my efforts on behalf of my constituents.

You know all that prayer — and I know most of the people who have said that are very sincere and I'm sure that it's true of people I haven't even met — but that prayer doesn't make me a perfect man. It may not even make me a better politician, but it is an element that sustains me when decisions are tough, when you get discouraged, when you feel overworked, when you're tired, when you've spent too much time away from your family, those comments, those prayers offered up for me have been a godsend. And I really want to acknowledge that support and thank my constituents for that very personal level of encouragement that they have provided.

Mr. Speaker, at this point I can't go on any further without acknowledging the love and support of my wife who has always played a bit of a background role. She says frequently, politics is Wayne's job, you know; I iron his shirts. She's pretty self-deprecating and underestimates her value and her role in my life. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wouldn't be here tonight if it wasn't for the support of my wife, who might be watching tonight by the way — I'm not sure. But I'm putting this on the record publicly because she needs to know and others need to know how important she has been over the many years that we've been together.

I'd like to acknowledge my constituency office staff — Beth,

Carol, and Glenna. All three women work diligently to provide support to my constituents and to help me represent those constituents in a very practical and pragmatic way. And I want to recognize our ministerial staff here in the office: Clay who works tirelessly and reads more than anybody I know; April who organizes my life and keeps our office running effectively and efficiently; Alison who does our communications and public relations stuff — she writes a lot of my speeches and helps me out in that respect; and Scott who does our casework. That team of four people here in Regina have been invaluable to me.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a minister having an opportunity to serve at this level, you know, we get a lot of comments and often we get credit for things that we have achieved. And I've had the good fortune of having many of those kind of comments directed to my office and to me personally. But I want to say as well that we could never at any level achieve the kind of successes we achieve without the very effective and conscientious support of our senior administration people in the various ministries.

In my case, I'm fortunate to have John Law as my deputy minister, and assistant deputy ministers George Stamatinos, Terry Schmidt, Ted Stobbs. And they are supported by about 1,500 employees in the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. And I have all the faith in the world that these people are doing not just their job to the best of their ability, but they are committed to the success of this ministry.

You know, I've said from time to time that my goal as minister is to make sure that the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure is the best transportation ministry, not just in Canada, but in all of North America. It's a lofty goal, but when you challenge people with that kind of objective, you'd be surprised how they stand up and salute, how they take that as an endorsement and an encouragement to them to achieve even better things. And I'm certain that we have seen that in our ministry this year.

I am very proud of the ministry and how they've responded to the challenges that we have placed before them. We put them under a great deal of pressure this last year by giving them the largest budget they've ever had to work with. We stretched them. We pushed them. We prodded them. They achieved some outstanding results, and I think it's because this government believes in their ability to perform well on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan, and we are thrilled with what we've seen so far.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget, what do we have? We have \$630 million that has come to the Highways and Infrastructure ministry. That is the largest budget that has ever been seen by this ministry in the history of the province — \$630 million as compared to \$513 million last year at this time. That \$630 million represents 224 million for maintenance, which is a 10 per cent increase year over year, and \$358 million which is the largest amount ever for capital projects in our ministry. We're going to have the busiest construction season yet.

Last year we got work done on 1500 kilometres. In some instances, it was a complete rebuild. It might've been a brand new highway. In some areas it was maybe a repaving project or maybe it was sand sealing or crack filling, but we did work on

1580 kilometres, I believe, was the exact number. And because we were able to reach that — and that again was a milestone; I don't think we've ever seen that kind of work, that volume of work accomplished before — but because we set that record of achievement, we've used that as our benchmark this year and going forward, given the projects we've got on the books, we anticipate doing another 1580 kilometres of improvements or maintenance work on our highways as a benchmark.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're going to see so much work as a result of this budget and the initiatives of our ministry and the support of our contracting and road building industry in Saskatchewan, that people are going to be amazed when they see the volume of work all across the roads of the province.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a \$45 million program for bridges this year. Now we have in this province about 1,000 bridges and 800 culverts on the provincial highway system. Most of those bridges and culverts date back to, oh the late '40s, early '50s, maybe some into the '60s, but they're all at that 40-, 45-, maybe 50-year time frame, and they have actually outlived pretty much their reliable usefulness. And because of that, we've had to intensify our spending and our programs to upgrade those bridges, replace them where necessary, and certainly have a replacement program for the culverts. And we've contributed \$45 million to that undertaking this year.

Ten million dollars this year is going to go to a brand new project that I'm sure my friend from Batoche and people who live along Highway 2 south of Prince Albert are going to appreciate, and that is the first stage of replacing the St. Louis bridge. This is a bridge that is almost 100 years old.

And I want to tell you a little story, Mr. Deputy Speaker. About a week after I was appointed to this job, I got an email from a fellow who said, this new government isn't doing very much. I just drove over the St. Louis bridge. There's a big hole in the deck. I almost lost my wheel in it. When are you going to fix this? Well I emailed the fellow back and I said, did that hole just appear in the last week? I don't think so. That bridge has been around for 96 years, and I don't think it would probably pass many more inspections before it would be condemned.

The problem with that bridge now is that while it handles routine commuter traffic, it can't handle primary weight. It can't handle heavy traffic. And because of that, that primary weight corridor, Highway 2, which runs from Assiniboia in the south of the province to La Ronge in the north, has a big hole when that traffic comes to crossing the North Saskatchewan River. That's the St. Louis bridge. And that gap in that corridor, which is so crucial to economic growth and prosperity along that stretch of road, that gap has prevented the full realization of the economic potential of the region. And over the next three years, we're going to completely replace the St. Louis bridge at a cost of 30 to \$35 million.

Because of the spending we've allocated to Highways in this budget, we're well on our way to not just meeting our election promise, but exceeding it. Our election promise was to spend a minimum of \$1.8 billion over four years. Well in our first two years now, we're at \$1.1 billion, and at the rate we're going, we're going to exceed our promise significantly.

Keeping the promise of the establishment of a five-year rolling plan for the province's road construction and maintenance program was key to our success last year. We finally had a chance to get all the roads in the province evaluated. We created the plan, announced it back in December of this last year. And now the people of the province have a very clear idea how we're going to accomplish our road repairs, what the timetable will be, what roads will be fixed in what priority, and there is some certainty associated with our rolling plan.

I think that that's a very great improvement to the way we deal with infrastructure issues in this province. In fact it was so well received that even the critic for the opposition commented about the importance of a plan like that and why they could support that initiative.

[20:45]

What else have we done? Well we've developed a transportation centre of excellence at the University of Saskatchewan. And we have high expectations for that operation. We just got it up and running. There's a board of directors who met in December. They've got two objectives, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The one for the centre is to provide educational opportunities for employees from the Ministry of Highways who want to upgrade their technical skills, who want to go back and take some specialized coursework, who might want to pursue a master's or a Ph.D. [Doctor of Philosophy] in engineering.

The other objective of that centre of excellence is to fund and develop projects that will enhance our ability to develop infrastructure in this province that will be sustainable, environmentally sustainable, will have a longer life expectancy, and will produce a better product for a lesser cost.

That's a huge undertaking but it has immense potential for our province and we think it's a venture well worth undertaking. The University of Saskatchewan has come on as a very willing partner on this project and we're excited about what's going to be happening there over the next number of years.

You know, the interesting thing about that centre of excellence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that if we can produce a better quality road building material or a better design for roads overall, we have the perfect laboratory to test that new technology right here in Saskatchewan. We have some of the most extreme climatic conditions — the hottest summers, the coldest winters, expansion and contraction.

We've got heavy truck traffic. We've got a real serious issue in this province with aggregate. We're losing the best sources of our aggregate. In fact, people will tell you, engineering people will tell you that the best source for gravel in the province of Saskatchewan today is what's in the road right now. And when you look at the environmental sensitivities that are facing our province and so much of the rest of the construction world, we would be well served to come up with technology where we can reuse the gravel in the existing roads and reapply it in new ways to provide better road surfaces.

And we think that if we can achieve those goals, those technological goals through some of the research at the centre

for excellence, we will have a product that not only will benefit Saskatchewan; it will benefit virtually every jurisdiction in the world because what we will have will be unique technology and proprietary technology that is exportable. And there are nations all around the world looking for new and better ways to build highways — sustainable, environmentally sound ways to build highways. We think that we have an opportunity to develop that technology right here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this budget there's a \$100 million dollar investment to rebuild our rural highways. That includes 250 kilometres of brand new work or work-in-progress for the upcoming construction season. That includes 300 kilometres of repaving work that is going to be undertaken around the province.

We have four separate programs available for funding in the municipal sector. We've got funding for road and bridge improvements through the municipal resource roads program, the heavy-haul, high-volume program, Clearing the Path, and the municipal bridge program. Those four programs now are moving from the Municipal Affairs ministry to the Highways ministry so that we can provide a strategic and streamlined approach to transportation and infrastructure across the province.

We've doubled the funding for these programs. Last year we supplied about \$20 million to rural RMs [rural municipality] that wanted to undertake initiatives under these various programs. This year we're contributing \$40 million to that program. That's intended to address a really significant backlog, a huge deficit in infrastructure in rural Saskatchewan at the rural municipal level.

I talked about the 1,000 bridges that we have in the provincial system. The RMs around the province have double that. They've got closer to 2,000. And I think their culverts number in the range of 1,200 to 1,500 — I don't recall that just off the top of my head.

But they are facing the same kind of pressure that our provincial highway system is facing for a couple of reasons. First of all, the truck traffic has expanded enormously. The volume of trucks, just the sheer number of heavy trucks on the road has increased significantly. But the other issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the fact that those trucks are carrying an ever greater weight. And the impact on our infrastructure that was built in the '50s, designed for 2- or 3-ton trucks, simply can't accommodate the wear and tear and the beating that this larger and heavier traffic volume produces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we're running out of time, I think. But we have some exciting opportunities that exist in northern Saskatchewan. And I really want to pay some attention to this because I know it's an issue for some members opposite, especially those who represent northern constituencies. They've said, why aren't you doing more about roads in northern Saskatchewan?

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since I became the minister I've been very candid about this issue. I believe — we believe as a government — that so much of our future economic opportunity and potential resides in the North, that we know

we're going to have to provide an adequate transportation system to help us develop and expand those economic opportunities, not just for the benefit of the province economically but for the social benefit of the people who live in the North.

And so, given the success of our road strategy, our rolling five-year plan for infrastructure in southern Saskatchewan, building on what we've learned as a result of that initiative, we want to undertake a similar process in northern Saskatchewan and come up with a very strategic plan to address northern infrastructure, based on transparent criteria, based on similar criteria from place to place, comparing the two different projects on a points basis and prioritizing them on that level.

So northern infrastructure is going to be a very important feature of our upcoming year. Although we didn't identify it as such in our budget, that is the one area that we're planning to undertake.

I can tell by the sound to my right here that some of my colleagues are getting impatient with the length of my speech. And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I've got at least 10 or 12 pages here I haven't even touched yet. And I was going to add a bunch of material yet this evening.

I want to just talk a little bit more about some of the things that we have already identified as urgent in the North in terms of work. All-weather roads are very important because they will not just support the individual communities up there; they will support economic development. And the other thing that's important about any project we would undertake in the North is that we want to develop capacity among the people of the North. So we will have a 60 per cent requirement for northern participation in any of the contracts that we undertake up there, if at all achievable.

And we're also going to work aggressively to secure federal and private sector funding, especially for the roads in the Athabaskan Basin. We have some roads that need attention, from Points North up to Stony Rapids, from Stony Rapids to Fond-du-Lac, and the Wollaston Lake Road. Those are roads in particular that we are trying to develop a partnership to see those roads built to an all-weather, all-season standard, and help us access northern communities in a more safe and reliable manner.

We've got some gravel crushing that's scheduled for this year on Highway 155. We've got paving planned for 2010 for about 20 kilometres from Green Lake to just south of Beaver River and approximately 15 kilometres north of Beauval.

So when I hear members opposite complain about nothing being planned for the North, Mr. Speaker, I'm here to say that it's simply not the case. We have already undertaken some initiatives. We're doing exploratory work on ways to finance and move forward on some of these projects, but we've already committed a number of contracts for work-in-progress in the North.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk briefly about the short-line rail program that we've introduced. You know, last year we put together a program for short-line rails. There wasn't a lot of

money in it; it amounted to about \$500,000. But it was so well received by the members of the short-line fraternity here in the province that they put it to almost immediate use. And one of their concerns was that that program wouldn't continue. I'm pleased to say that in the budget this year, not only have we continued it, but the uptake on the money on the part of the various short-line operations in this province is pretty aggressive. And we're pleased to see that.

And as a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency is home to the newest short-line railway that just went into operation, I believe, a week ago. And it's called the Great Sandhills Railway. It runs from the area around Swift Current up to the community of Leader, over to the community of Burstall. It is primarily grain dependent, but they do have the benefit of some gas shipments that come out of Burstall, and it's going to help the long-term economic viability of that railway. But it will serve a very important purpose to the producers in that region. And I'm happy to see that that rail line is up and running because I think it has the potential to be a real success story.

You know, we've generated some interesting comments from people around the province as a result of this budget. I've been, as I said earlier, in this House for 10 years and I don't think I've ever seen a budget that is well regarded as this particular budget. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you don't have to take my word for it. The viewers at home don't have to take my word for it. We don't have to take anybody else's word for it in the House. But there are important third party spokespersons who have attested to their support for this particular budget.

And I didn't bring it with me, but if one of my colleagues did, we have a compilation of about, oh, comments that are about an inch and a half thick in any collection of paper, of third party respondents who are saying, this budget works well for us and it's the right thing to do, and it helps us in this area and that area.

But I have a couple of comments from my own constituents. And I just want to read these for the record because I think it's important to show that the support for this budget isn't partisan. And the reason I can say that is twofold, and I'll give you an example. I want to read from an email that came to me from a couple of constituents who I know personally, who have always been supportive of the New Democrats. They have always voted that way; they've always supported that political party. And over the years I've got to know these people because I arranged to bring them to the legislature from time to time for the budget.

Oh, this is the short list. This is the more impressive list of third party accolades that the budget garnered. And I want to show this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because none of this is comprised of comments from my colleagues. None of this is comprised from party supporters. This documentation is coming from people, third party, independent people who said this budget is important.

But getting back to this email from a couple of constituents who I know have been long-time NDP supporters, let me just read this into the record:

Thank you very much for the invitation to the budget address yesterday [I've done this for this couple over a number of years]. It was a pleasure to see democracy in action. I think your direction [and I'm quoting here now, I think your direction] in the budget cannot be faulted. It seems to be following along the lines of prudent government, which is good to see.

And then it goes on to say, and I'm quoting again:

I am very proud to be a citizen of this province. It has provided me and the ones I love an excellent living. It needs to be cherished and honoured. Like anyone else I like a taxcut. But if we slip into debt, and the civil service is subsequently decimated, or the crowns sold off, then my taxcut will come with a cost I could not bear.

I'm here to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I share those concerns, and in fact this budget is a document that clearly says those things will not happen, because it sets this province on the right financial foundation moving forward. And because it does, we do not have to worry about this, slipping into debt, the civil service being decimated, or the Crowns being sold off. That would be too high a cost for us to pay and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to share those comments.

I have another brief email from another constituent that says:

Wayne, good budget, good work. With management like this you might be in government for a long time!!! Let's hope so!

I think that speaks volumes to the kind of support we're getting for this particular initiative.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was at a public event in Regina on Saturday night. I shared a table with people who are supporters of the Liberal Party at the federal level. One of the gentlemen there is a labour lawyer. Not one person around that table had anything negative to say about this budget.

[21:00]

This is not a partisan document. It is a practical document. It is one that will serve the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan for many years to come. I'm proud to have been part of the government that brought this document forward.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I have much more to say, I am going to conclude by indicating that I will be supporting this budget; I couldn't possibly support the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Quennell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not by design, it's entirely by coincidence that I happen to follow the member from Cypress Hills. I listened carefully to all of his remarks. He hoped that he could fit everything he wanted to say within 20 minutes and I'm afraid he didn't make it. And I hope that I can,

Mr. Speaker, fit what I have to say within 20 minutes.

But the member from Cypress Hills is certainly one of the people in this Chamber for whom I have a considerable personal respect, although we've disagreed on many things and I imagine we'll disagree on many things in the future. But I was interested in his opening comments about the privilege of being able to speak in this Chamber. And I often think about that as well.

I haven't had the privilege as long — about half as long as the member from Cypress Hills. I hope to have it for some time longer, as long as the spirit holds out and the voters of Saskatoon Meewasin or whatever seat might be drawn in Saskatoon where I run will have me.

But in the morning I don't just read the local news, Mr. Speaker. I often read news out of Burma or Madagascar or watch Russia move further and further away from the democracy which it seemed to be approaching at one point in time. And I think that we are very fortunate to live in this place. And we're also, I think, very fortunate to live in this time.

I was reading a short biography of Alexander Hamilton, and I think everybody in this House will know the story. After a long political career in which he was a very valuable founder of the new democracy, the United States of America, he came to the very strong opinion that Aaron Burr should not be governor of New York — the state from which Alexander Hamilton came — and expressed this view through one of the New York papers which he helped found. And Aaron Burr did not become the governor of New York and wasn't very happy about the result. And ultimately the two men fought a duel which Aaron Burr had challenged Alexander Hamilton to. And Alexander Hamilton shot in the air. Aaron Burr shot to kill and killed Alexander Hamilton. And that's in a democracy, Mr. Speaker.

And so as heated as debates get in here, and as divisive as politics can sometimes seem in Saskatchewan, it is a privileged time and place in which we live. And whatever respect or lack of respect the population has for politicians generally — whether it's for the member from Cypress Hills or the member from Saskatoon Meewasin — it is still a privilege to represent them and a privilege to serve in a democracy and debate matters of public importance in a free legislature, Mr. Speaker.

I think Allan Blakeney said, and I hope I'm quoting him correctly, that it's hard to spend \$1 million without helping somebody. And \$10 billion, as this budget spends, is 10,000 times \$1 million. And it's even harder to spend \$10 billion without helping somebody.

So of course the budget is full of good measures and is helpful on a number of fronts and priorities that both sides of this House agree upon, in health care and education and highways and infrastructure and so on, Mr. Speaker. There's no doubt about that. You could not spend \$10 billion without helping somebody, Mr. Speaker. But the issue is really priorities: 12 billion would even make more people happy, and 14 billion even more.

But there are limits, Mr. Speaker, and governments have to make choices. And members of the government, in debating the

budget, like to pretend that the opposition should have to make choices — that we should have to just decide what should not be in this budget or what should be in this budget — when in fact that's not the case. That falls to the side of the House that has the confidence of the legislature, has the majority within this legislature to make a budget.

It falls to the opposition to question whether the budget is sound, Mr. Speaker, and not to provide an alternative budget. Mr. Speaker, we don't have the resources that the Ministry of Finance has. But we can raise some concerns, and we have raised some concerns, and actually we will continue to do so over the course of this debate. And I think these fall within three broad areas: that the budget is not realistic, Mr. Speaker, that the budget is not sustainable, and that the budget is not fair. And I'll deal with each of those in order.

First that the budget is not realistic, Mr. Speaker, is probably the most simplest and easiest of the propositions to argue for, and I'll be very brief on it. Speakers have commented on, and I imagine will continue to comment on the discrepancy that exists within the budget document of the Ministry of Finance forecast — which doesn't seem to have any basis or any explanation for it — of 2.1 per cent, and the private sector forecasts, none of which was as high as 2.1 per cent. It's not like the government picked the highest of the private sector forecasts. None of them were as high as that, but the average was 1 per cent.

So the Finance forecasts that the Minister of Finance puts forward as the core assumption of his budget for economic growth in the province of Saskatchewan, 2.1 per cent, is twice the private sector forecasts. Well the private sector forecasts have been downgraded since the budget came down and that's, you know, we don't expect the Minister of Finance to have a crystal ball, but we now are debating a budget that forecasted growth in the Saskatchewan economy at 2.1 per cent. We all hope that that's correct, but the private sector forecasts are for point six three per cent on average, Mr. Speaker.

So the government's forecast of budgetary growth is now three times what the average is for the private sector forecasts. And we question whether that assumption is realistic, when it is off the private sector forecasts by a factor of three, Mr. Speaker.

There's been some debate about the value of revenues from potash to this budget and to the assumptions of the budget, and that 18 cents on the dollar of revenue for this budget comes from potash — potash one way or the other, Mr. Speaker — and the government and particularly the Minister of Energy and Resources says that we do not need to be too concerned about cutbacks in production of potash. That that's not where the money comes from; it's based upon sales.

Now you take that to its logical extreme and you stop producing potash at all; as long as we're selling potash, it doesn't matter if we're actually producing any. But of course you have to produce potash to sell potash and ultimately production does matter at some point. It may not matter in the short term but it ultimately does matter.

The strategy, as I understand it, Mr. Speaker, in relation to potash production is that there is a great deal of concern in the markets about the sustainability of the current price — that the

Chinese want to buy potash but they don't necessarily want to buy potash at the current price. Brazilians want to buy potash but not necessarily at the current price. And of course every economy in the world is strained and less able to purchase what they might want to purchase than they have been before. And so the strategy, as I understand it in the case of potash, is to hold up the price, sustain the price by cutting production actually, and therefore hold up the government revenues as well as company revenues.

Now the winner, if the strategy works, is first of all the potash companies, Mr. Speaker, because the price doesn't drop, and secondly the government because the price doesn't drop. And as the minister points out, most of the revenue is based upon price and on the sale taking place at that price, that current price, Mr. Speaker.

The only losers in this strategy, if it works, are the laid off potash workers. And, Mr. Speaker, because of course they're not producing potash, they're part of the strategy to cut production and keep the price higher by cutting supply, Mr. Speaker, in supply demand, keeping the price up. And that works for the company, that works largely for the government. It doesn't work for the potash workers that are laid off and, if the strategy fails, Mr. Speaker, then it doesn't work for anybody.

And if the price drops anyways, Mr. Speaker, then unfortunately so do the revenues of the province and in a significant way. That may not be the case, Mr. Speaker, and the price of potash may stay at its current levels. The revenues of the province may stay at the current levels. But one has to admit that the government's forecast on economic growth across the board are three times what the private sector forecast and that that alone gives the budget an air of unreality.

Now secondly on the question of sustainability in the budget. The budget forecasts, and we will see, I expect, further spending — and I'll come to why I believe that to be the case — further spending after this budget, for the budget forecasts an increase of 12.4 per cent in government spending following a similar increase in the last budget, the first Saskatchewan Party government budget last year.

Well at an average of 12 per cent, and we've now had two years where we've had that kind of double-digit increase, government spending will double every six years. Well I think every member of this House knows that doubling government spending every six years isn't sustainable.

So the current increase in spending just cannot be maintained, Mr. Speaker; it just can't be done. And the tough decisions that have to be made, that the government would like the opposition to make for them in some of their speeches, the tough decisions that have to be made, the government is putting off. And whether they're putting it off until next year or the year after that, they're putting those decisions off, Mr. Speaker. And they're putting off their commitment to increase government spending 3 per cent annually. Over the last two years they've already spent seven years of government spending increases by their commitment, Mr. Speaker.

So they like to talk about the number of promises they've kept

but they don't talk very much about very substantial ones that they haven't kept and aren't very close to keeping, and one of them is their conservative commitment on increases in government spending.

The reason that I say that 12.4 per cent is probably not going to be the end of the story is that the government seems to have held the line on health care spending. The increase in the budget is 3 per cent, which is remarkable and I don't think realistic.

Mr. Speaker, to go back to my first point, I expect the health regions will not be able to survive on the increase that has been provided by the Ministry of Health. I expect the government hopes that its estimates or revenues are actually conservative so that it can backfill those deficits at a later stage, Mr. Speaker. And if that's the case, then spending will be over 12 per cent and if revenues aren't higher than the government expects them to be, that will be the end of the balanced budget.

And in respect to both the forecast, which seems to be drawn from thin air by this government, 2.1 per cent economic growth for the province, and we certainly hope they're correct but I haven't heard . . . I've heard a number of speakers. I haven't heard anybody from the government explain where that number comes from, Mr. Speaker.

And in respect to the increase in spending, the optimism that's expressed in both those acts of what the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation would call creative financing, Mr. Speaker, that optimism is reminiscent of the early Devine years where after a while it did get a touch of unreality, Mr. Speaker. Where revenues would be forecast to almost meet expenditures, Mr. Speaker, but there was no basis for those forecasts and every year included not only overly optimistic forecasts but an explanation as to why last year's forecasts were so far off the mark. So unrealistic, unsustainable, Mr. Speaker, and I would argue, in its effects, unfair.

[21:15]

Much touting of the change in the way that property taxes are assessed and applied in our province, Mr. Speaker. I represent a seat in Saskatoon. Almost a third of the people in my riding voted for the Saskatchewan Party. Many of them were people who usually don't vote, Mr. Speaker, and I think it can be assumed came out, in an unusual act of civic responsibility for them, to throw out a government. In the case of Saskatoon Meewasin, they weren't successful. The New Democrat MLA of course was returned.

But I think they also voted for specific promises of the government. I'm not so sure about whether they voted for the promise to keep the government spending at 3 per cent increases annually. I'm pretty sure that many of them voted for a \$450 property tax cut, Mr. Speaker. And they're not going to get it, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, according to government budget documents, a family of four, \$75,000 income, average house for that family, will pay \$400 more in property taxes in 2009 than they paid in 2007, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the members, the members from Saskatoon from the Saskatchewan Party caucus, Saskatchewan Party government will be pointing to all kinds of fine print about assessments,

about real estate values and such, Mr. Speaker. But they won't be able to point to that fine print in their election pamphlets or any of the other material that was provided to the voters in Saskatoon Meewasin.

There weren't any asterisks next to the promise. They didn't say, well in fact we will decrease property taxes in Saskatoon by 3.3 per cent, which wasn't going to be \$450 anyways, over what they would otherwise have been if we had done nothing, Mr. Speaker. So if we had done nothing, you wouldn't get a \$400 property tax increase. You'd get an even larger property tax increase.

So your \$400 property tax increase, Mr. Speaker, is actually, according to the government, a decrease. But I don't think my constituents are going to see it that way, Mr. Speaker. I think my constituents are going to look at the percentages that property taxes are going down in certain government members' ridings and compare it to the increase that they are getting on their own homes and say, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if my MLA is correct about this budget being unrealistic; I don't know if my MLA is correct about this budget being unsustainable; but I do know my MLA is correct about this budget being unfair, Mr. Speaker.

Now we now live in a province that has the highest inflation rate in the country. And that inflation rate is primarily under the control of the Government of Saskatchewan, which has decided to do nothing about it.

That inflation rate is fuelled primarily by utility rate increases, Mr. Speaker, and the cost of natural gas went up 21 per cent when this long, cold winter started. And this government — the Sask Party government — refused to do what they said what they would do in opposition, which is to provide people with rebates. Refused to do what they do in Alberta — to provide people with rebates. Refused to do what previous NDP governments had done — to provide people with rebates as relief — and will hold on to that increase until this winter is over, until April 1, Mr. Speaker.

And that, and the SaskPower increase, and the government's refusal to do with fuel taxes what they said they would do when they were in opposition — those are the matters, as much as anything else, that fuel the inflation rate in the province of Saskatchewan.

And who is hurt by that, Mr. Speaker, the most? Low-income people and people on fixed incomes. And the budget documents show that it is people on low incomes that are now worse off after — after — the government's much-touted tax decrease on income taxes, after the government's much-touted changes to property tax, which are unfairly applied. After all that, because of matters under this Sask Party government's control, because of the role the Crown corporations play in this province, they have the power to have made a real difference to the affordability of the poorest among us. Because of their failure to do that, Mr. Speaker, those people are worse off after the boom than they were before, Mr. Speaker.

And so a government, a budget, Mr. Speaker, that spends \$10 billion, as I said, it would be hard to do that and not do some good, and no one on this side of the House wants to suggest that

no good will be done.

But it's a budget of an undisciplined government, unwilling to make tough decisions, unwilling to face the serious prospects, to look at sober third party forecasts; and so it's a budget that is unrealistic; it's unsustainable; and not connected to either of those, so even inexcusably, I would say, Mr. Speaker, unfair. And for those reasons I will not be supporting the budget. I will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Wilson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my fellow members, and members opposite. It's with great pleasure that I'm able to address you today, and I thank you for this opportunity. After a long and busy winter — and it's still winter — in each of our constituencies, it's an honour to be back and attending a sitting of this Assembly, representing the interests of the Saskatchewan Rivers constituency.

I'd like to thank my husband, Douglas, and our four children, Matthew, Brigitt, Lacey, and Markus for being so supportive. I'd also like to acknowledge several members, my colleagues and the members from Melfort, Canora-Pelly, and Rosetown-Elrose constituencies. They deserve an honourable mention for their hours of work towards a strong and sound budget. The rest of my colleagues also deserve praise for their input during a time of economic uncertainty.

This budget will address the concerns of Saskatchewan people in many ways. Our government will ensure that all Saskatchewan people benefit. This takes a great effort by many dedicated people. The difficult is what takes a little time; however, the long unattainable is what takes a little longer.

We have listened to our constituents' requests and have delivered. We have committed to history-making tax cuts and record infrastructure investment — two very welcome concepts in Saskatchewan Rivers. We have also pledged to help our most important asset — people of all ages and especially our very young and our elderly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government serves the needs of all strata of Saskatchewan society: low-income households, persons with disabilities, families with dependants, Aboriginal peoples, students, seniors, and youth at risk. Most importantly this budget will ensure that the most vulnerable among us, our children, will not be left behind. We need to do everything we possibly can to ensure that our children are healthy and active and they develop into responsible, capable adults.

Responsible parents have the most important job in the world, and we as legislators must ensure that parents have every tool they need to form a responsible young adult from the mould of infancy. Therefore it's imperative that we address the needs of children as early as possible. Our province's children and youth are our greatest asset. And our provincial government recognizes this with investments in child care, child welfare, library funding, the active families benefit, and a new children's hospital in Saskatoon.

Saskatchewan Rivers has a large and growing young population. Therefore the \$200 million dedicated to the new children's hospital in Saskatoon is badly needed and will no doubt ensure a better life for all of our children.

The smaller towns in my riding will also benefit from the \$12.3 million which will be invested in libraries. Libraries are one of the most important landmarks in our rural communities and are an investment for the future of our children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as jobs continue to open up province-wide, we must also ensure that we are producing a strong workforce here at home. Investing in education and skills training will ensure that the next generation will be readily poised to lead our province more capably than we have, because that's the reason we work so hard, is to make life better for our children.

We envision a Saskatchewan in which our children carry and propel the greatest ideals on earth — charity, volunteerism, pioneerism, and ingenuity. These ideas are what make our province strong and free.

Saskatchewan people constitute a source of resources, insight, and gathered material that compels our attention and the need to change what is not working to a path of positive action and reason. Every law that we pass affects the lives of every citizen in Saskatchewan, and I welcome the necessary debate and amendment of Bills when considering legislation.

As in our home constituencies, I have found the solution to most problems is our ability to listen, analyze, and decide which is the best route to resolution. From the newborn infant and the family that embraces him to our seniors and immigrants, our government's philosophy is that no one will be left behind.

The material in this budget will prove our government's reasoning and analysis towards the issues faced by Saskatchewan people. While we as a province become stronger and more powerful in this country, it's important that we do not become the most envied. Leading the country economically means leading the country with high social standards for all Saskatchewan citizens by providing a high quality of life for all.

This budget also addresses the efforts made by the Government of Saskatchewan to keep our life affordable for all residents of the province, including taking steps to ensure our economy continues to grow in this time of global economic uncertainty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan Rivers is a rural constituency with special needs which require attention. We will support an enterprise region program that encourages regional economic development. Our government will continue to support those who diversify our economy. We are encouraging entrepreneurship and new ideas. And I'd like to use this time to thank and acknowledge these rural folks for the contributions they make to our economy and our province.

Our small businesses and trucking companies add a great deal to our economy. Rural farm families also fuel our economy while putting food on the world's table, and I want to use this time to acknowledge their efforts.

Increased funding will allow improvements in crop insurance programs and agriculture support programs to better suit the producers' needs. I believe that rural communities have been left out of the limelight for several years and that it's this time to celebrate.

This budget addresses the concerns of rural constituents and for that I'm honoured to be the voice of the small towns across Saskatchewan Rivers. People who live in smaller rural communities in Saskatchewan Rivers are some of the best people I've ever known. We support each other economically and socially, and volunteerism is a way of life in small town Saskatchewan. We help our neighbours when in need, and much like our parents and grandparents who built this country, we come together to enthusiastically achieve community goals.

The people who built this province are now seniors, and we must do everything in our power to honour and respect their dedication over the years. The provincial government has pledged to make life more affordable for seniors, for low-income, single seniors. We have raised the maximum monthly benefit from 90 to \$190. These pioneers shaped our communities through volunteering and sacrificing their time to build the hockey and curling rinks dotted through the small towns of our province. Some even sacrificed their lives during wartime, making the ultimate sacrifice for their country and people. On that note I would like to thank the veterans who graced us with their presence on budget day.

[21:30]

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — I want to acknowledge their loyalty and commitment to us. We must thank them for the excellent quality of life we enjoy today. I'm sure that we all have a connection to a veteran who has touched our lives, and to these brave souls we owe a debt of gratitude as their efforts to uphold our values of democracy and freedom will never be forgotten.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Saskatchewan Rivers has been looking for property tax cuts, and our government kept that promise and delivered a long-term solution to that problem. The over amount of tax paid by Saskatchewan property owners to fund education will be reduced by \$103 million in 2009. This represents the largest education property tax cut in a single year in the province's history.

Our government realizes the important role that these small towns and municipalities play in the province's growth and prosperity. Therefore this budget fulfills the government's commitment to a new revenue-sharing deal with municipalities.

In addition to the increase in municipal operating grants, funding of \$151.8 million for municipal infrastructure projects has also been secured through a combination of provincial and federal funding. Rural Saskatchewan has not been forgotten. Through the education property tax rate cut, agriculture and commercial industries will benefit through new revenue-sharing plans, providing a reliable source of revenue to Saskatchewan Rivers communities.

Our government's goal is to secure Saskatchewan as a safe

place to live and raise a family, where people are confident in their future, ensuring the people of Saskatchewan benefit from the growing economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge and thank those responsible for the twinning of Highway 11 to Prince Albert. This double-lane highway will unite the province and bring us as close together as any project in Saskatchewan's history. The project has been many years in the making and I'm proud to announce that our provincial government has planned its completion.

This highway is a gateway to the North and a gateway to the Saskatchewan Rivers constituency. I'm looking forward to the many benefits of this completed highway. This is great news for business, and I welcome the safety aspect of a twinned highway as well. Another important aspect is that it would be much easier for visitors to see what our constituency has to offer, such as Elk Ridge and Murray Point in the beautiful Lakelands area.

2008 has been an exciting year for us in Saskatchewan Rivers. However, the most exciting thing to happen to me so far this year is the birth of my first grandson.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Yes, I have one more in my constituency and his name is Casey Wilson, born on January 20, 2009. He is fifth generation on our family farm and with the property tax savings I feel he will be there as well as I for a little while yet.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — I would love for my grandson to enjoy the same quality of life in rural Saskatchewan that I was lucky enough to have enjoyed. I want him to be able to favour the flavour of the rural community life with close, friendly neighbours, safe roads, and quality education. And I believe this budget supports these ideals and is a step in the right direction.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Ms. Wilson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we listened to President Obama's speech on inauguration day of January 20, 2009, we heard him say, "On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear."

And as the member from Swift Current has stated, "That's the road I choose. On that road and on no other, hope will win and fear will lose."

I too choose hope. I'd like to end my speech by quoting another elected official, Klas Arnoldson, a Nobel prize winner. And I think this exemplifies our new government stance which ensures that all Saskatchewan people will benefit and that hope is something we can all aspire to.

Without confidence in a cause, there is no action. Ignorance may be enlightened, superstition wiped out; intolerance may become tolerant, and hate be changed into love; ideas may be quickened, intelligence widened, and men's hearts may be ennobled; but from pessimism which can see nothing but gloomy visions nothing is to be

expected.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conclusion, I am honoured to be part of this government with a vision for change, and I'm pleased to be working with my esteemed colleagues in making Saskatchewan a strong province with steady growth. Most of all it's been an honour for the past year and half to represent the fine constituents of Saskatchewan Rivers, and I thank them for their continued guidance and support in moving our province forward.

I will not be supporting the amendment, but I'm honoured to be supporting the budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Kelvington-Wadena.

Hon. Ms. Draude: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I'm delighted to stand here today to speak in favour of the budget presented last week by my colleague, the member from Melfort, on behalf of our government for the people of Saskatchewan. I'd like to thank him on behalf of the people from Kelvington-Wadena constituency for his work and his very focused determination to achieve the goals and the vision set out by our Premier and by our government.

I believe this is a legacy budget. It has set a direction of cautious optimism that defines who we are as a government. It sets out clearly the understanding we have as a responsibility of being a government — the responsibility to provide health care, education, infrastructure, and a hand up, not a handout, for those who are struggling. It provides security and the knowledge that we have a savings account for the unexpected.

And perhaps the most important signal it sends in these uncertain fiscal times is this — as a government we know families are also having to make decisions. Families and individuals have the right to make choices personally on their financial future. That's why in this budget our government is focused on tax cuts, on taking less money from individuals, allowing them the choices to spend their own money. Individuals need the flexibility to make personal financial decisions.

In this budget you do not see our government making investments in SPUDCOs or Navigatas or dot-coms. We do not take hard-earned taxpayers' dollars and decide how to invest them because we believe as a government that we know better than the citizens. We know the citizens have the right make those decisions themselves. That's not our job.

This government, the Saskatchewan Party government, through this budget, will provide world-class education, health care, infrastructure, and security. We will continue to work to provide an investment climate and excited optimism to the investors that may come to our province. We're sending the message: come to Saskatchewan, work with us, invest with us, be part of the best economy in North America. And, most importantly, see Saskatchewan as it truly is — the best place in the world to live.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, less than a year and a half ago, the people of the province voted — in huge numbers — for change in government. People in Saskatchewan take their politics very seriously. They're careful people. They work hard. Very few of them are more than two generations away from the world of agriculture. Their grandparents, if not their parents, farmed. And most of them know that success comes from natural resources that we are blessed with as a province. And they know, as did their parents, that you can't take anything for granted with Mother Nature on one hand, and the dependency of the world markets on the other hand. You have to work hard.

And, Mr. Speaker, at the time of the last election in the fall of 2007, things were looking up a little bit in our province. There were some people moving in. The population had moved slightly upwards from the low of January 2006 when we were down to 992,295 people. And the prices of oil had gone up somewhat — it was actually \$95.93 at the time of the last election.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during that election, the members opposite — the NDP — carried on using the same old lines, the same old lack of vision and planning they've used since the beginning of their time. They clung to the fear tactics, their view of the world as a monster that we must protect ourselves from and cement the world out. And that's what they offered the people of Saskatchewan during the last election. They offered fear — fear of change, fear of tomorrow, and fear of the rest of the world. But it didn't work.

People of Saskatchewan voted for change and they voted for hope. They voted for optimism and vision and the right to reach for the opportunities with unlimited potential that they have personally, and that our province has collectively. And we have proven to them in the last 16 months that they made the right decision.

Mr. Speaker, I've listened for hours on end to the members opposite still clinging to their old mantra of gloom and doom and fear and despair as they talked about the budget. Some of them talked about too much spending. Some of them talked about not enough spending. Some of them talked about the fact that the projected growth of our province was too optimistic.

The member last night from Weyburn-Big Muddy indicated that in 2003 they had forecasted a budget of 6.8 per cent increase. I remember, at that time, the Minister of Finance saying that was totally acceptable, you were going to be able to do it. But when the actual numbers came out in '04-05, there was actually a 3.9 per cent increase, far below what they had anticipated. But I never once heard them talking about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it's absolutely beyond me how any thinking people can find fault with a budget that's the envy of not only every province in Canada but many nations in the world. Even before the Minister of Finance introduced the budget, the families, the men and women, the girls and boys in our province knew we were part of a very special happening. They know that we are unique in Saskatchewan. We had already introduced a number of measures to help low-income earners and those in need.

In the 2008 Throne Speech, we announced tax relief — 80,000

low-income earners no longer paid Saskatchewan income tax. Saskatchewan had new low-income tax credits. It put more money into the pockets of low-income people who paid no taxes — seniors and students and others — and low-income working families. Maximum tax credits provided to eligible families with children increased to \$600 per year — twice as much as under the NDP. There was additional tax savings to over 300,000 lower income provincial residents. It eliminated the 2008 tax refund for many people that were on social services and the new income support program for people with disabilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 2008-2009 budget included a number of other tax changes. It doubled the amount of caregiver tax credit. It doubled the infirm dependant tax credit. It doubled the supplemental disability tax credit, and it increased the disability tax credit, and it increased support for seniors in our province. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was all before the budget was announced just last week from our Finance minister.

Mr. Speaker, the budget last week provided for the citizens of our province hope for tomorrow. We have a news release that talked about the highlights. And I'm sure that many of our citizens already know. And the members opposite don't like to talk about it very much.

They don't want to talk about the fact that there's \$2.5 billion going to be spent on infrastructure over a year and a half. There was \$167.4 million increase for operating grants for municipalities — an increase of \$32.3 million or 24 per cent — step one of a two-year plan for the base for municipalities in our province. There's \$200 million towards a new children's hospital in Saskatoon. We have \$358.2 million for roads and highway across our province; \$1.6 million to hire new police officers.

We also have an opportunity for \$108.1 million for additional funding for our farm families for the income stabilization program, which includes \$102.1 million for crop insurance. This is one of the issues that our families have been waiting for in rural Saskatchewan for many years.

My colleagues have had an opportunity over the last few days to announce many of the other savings and helps that we have for the people of our province. I'm very proud to be part of a government that understands that we have an opportunity to give back to the people of this province, not take.

[21:45]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the money that we spent that paid down the debt of our province, paid down \$2.6 billion worth of debt, saved \$900 million in interest savings. That \$900 means a brighter and more secure future for people in our province when they're in a world where there's very much uncertainty.

There may have been some mumblings from the members opposite, maybe some from the general public, and maybe a little disappointment if we'd done nothing more than just keep the status quo, if this budget had decided just to wait out the fiscal uncertainty that grips the markets today. But that's not the message that this government, our Sask Party government wanted to send. We're not climbing into a hole and pulling it in

around us. We're sending the message that we're ready to lead as the financial world makes its recovery. And more positively, we're not just waiting to see what will happen; we will make things happen as much as possible.

Saskatchewan under a Saskatchewan Party government is at least in part master of their own destiny. Saskatchewan, the province that we all love, is a shiny penny now and it's our right to take joy at that fact. Some may find it hard to accept that we are in the spotlight. But it's real and we worked very hard to get there. And let's not spoil it by reaching for the downside. Being realistic is healthy, but being negative will only hurt us.

I think we should speak about some of the positive aspects of our budget, where we see increases in areas that's so important to the future of our province, and that starts with the Ministry of Education. School divisions have an increase this year of \$241 million. There is a record of \$990.5 million going to school divisions in our province. As a result, the province will fund 63 per cent of the operating costs for K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education, up from last year's provincial spending of 51 per cent.

The government will also provide over \$3 million to support the work of the First Nations and Métis education unit and the innovation fund to school divisions. The Minister of Education, my friend and colleague from Canora, announced capital funding for schools in the Northern Lights School Division. He announced that there will be schools in La Ronge, La Loche, Pinehouse, Buffalo Narrows, Beauval — and that amounts to \$31.294 million, Mr. Speaker. This is the type of money that needs to be spent not just in the North but right across Saskatchewan so we do understand and people know that education is a priority for our government and for the future.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, education is a compass that will take us in the right direction for our future. This is true for everyone. Education helps find our way through the difficult times in our lives and makes it possible for us to build homes for our families and find the jobs we dream about. I am very thrilled to see this investment in education in our budget.

And we can also look to the other ministry for improvements to education funding. Advanced Education, Employment and Labour is investing \$23.5 million to enable universities to limit tuition increases to an average of 3 per cent. We'll also see stable funding continuing to flow to the First Nations University of Canada and \$2.5 million to support the excellent work of the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. We'll also maintain direct support to the Gabriel Dumont Institute and support the northern teacher education program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, returning to school is a daunting experience, but many more people will be able to do so because of the \$2.3 million dedicated to over 450 on-reserve adult education seats. My colleague from Canora last night also indicated that the school that was going to be built at Turner Lake will also include day care spaces for 21 children on the reserve at Turner Lake.

Advanced Education is also designating \$5.9 million for the Aboriginal Workforce Development Fund that will help

increase the workforce participation by First Nations and Métis people. This funding will be used for employment readiness programming and wage subsidies for First Nations and Métis people.

In the interest of getting people to work and ensuring our province can handle the economic opportunities on the horizon, the budget also directs major funding towards infrastructure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, economic development is one of the big priorities of our government. I believe if we can use infrastructure spending to help create a climate that enables the private sector to create more jobs, then we'll be doing our job as politicians and as governments. That is why within the ministry that I have the honour of representing, the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations, we are launching the northern enterprise regions this year in our budget. But before we develop a plan of how that will roll out, we're meeting with the northerners to see what they would like to see in their enterprise regions, and that consultation will begin in the next couple of weeks.

We're working with northern businesses and stakeholders. And these regions will increase business competitiveness and support the North to reach its economic potential and compete globally. Lessons that have been learned in the enterprise regions that were set up in the South can be learned, and we can avoid the pitfalls that may have happened in other areas. We want to make sure that northerners and First Nations and Métis people share in the growth of this province and the northern enterprise regions will help us make that possible.

We also see other spending in the North through this year's Highways ministry's budget. The Minister of Highways spoke a few minutes ago about the money that was earmarked for the northern road maintenance and also \$10 million for the Wollaston Lake all-weather road which is already under construction. The Minister of Highways is also going to develop a five-year plan for northern Saskatchewan roads. This is not part of the budget, but it will help us direct future funding to projects that need it the most.

Northern municipalities will also benefit from the predictable municipal revenue-sharing agreements, announced in this budget, that puts 1 per cent of the PST in the coffers of the municipalities. Knowing how much money is coming to you helps you plan for the future instead of being forced to wait until the opportunities pass you by.

I see many opportunities for us to pursue on behalf of the Saskatchewan people in the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations. My ministry continues to work towards strong and productive relationships with the First Nations and Métis people. We are working on reaffirming the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations]-Saskatchewan Bilateral Protocol agreement that outlines the principles and the mechanicals of our formal relationship. This relationship is very important to us as government, and we take seriously our role in listening to what the First Nations and Métis leaders tell us about their priorities.

Right now we are also working on the draft consultation framework, and our new extended deadline is June 1. We are receiving feedback on the draft policy, and we continue to

dialogue with the concerned parties about how best to improve it. I'm very much looking forward to getting to the exploratory phase of the consultation.

We need to work together to address the issues of how First Nations and Métis people will benefit in the wealth of the province, and also to address capacity needs, the environmental considerations, and dispute resolution as we help develop resources in our province. The true success with First Nations is when we negotiate, when we work together to develop plans such as the TLE [treaty land entitlement] agreements and the gaming agreements.

I really look forward to strengthening our relationship with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan through the revised bilateral process, ensuring their voices are being heard. My ministry will be providing over \$68 million to gaming benefits to First Nations and community economic and social programs. This is an increase of \$17 million over last year. We'll also be providing over \$4 million for the five treaty land entitlement settlement agreements.

We'll provide \$3 million of support to the First Nations and Métis to ensure they have the capacity to consult with government and develop . . . [inaudible] . . . that impact their rights. Our Consultation Participation Fund has been getting money out to the First Nations and Métis people on a regular basis over the past year so they can come to the table with the tools they need to meaningfully consult. This \$3 million fund is again in place this year.

The First Nations and Métis economic and development plan will invest \$750,000 into First Nations and Métis business start-up and expansions this year. The Aboriginal employment development program will continue to build partnerships with private employers to increase the number of First Nations and Métis people employed. We'll also continue the myth and misconception training through the AEDP [Aboriginal employment development program] program so workplaces are more welcome to the First Nations and Métis people.

Jobs are important. But as we experience life, we all know how precious health is to our overall richness of our life. Knowing this, our government will continue to support the Métis Addictions Council of Saskatchewan, the Muskeg Lake long-term care facility, and the Prince Albert youth addictions facility. The Health ministry is also dedicating \$250,000 in funding to develop a 10-year First Nations and Métis health plan to address the disparity in our First Nations and Métis health, compared to the rest of Saskatchewan's population.

The new children's hospital will bring new resources to our province. This so our children have the best medical care possible.

The basic necessities matter to all of us, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Ensuring that families have safe, accessible housing will continue to be a priority as the 150 First Nations housing projects involving \$19 million announced in 2008 will continue to move forward.

This budget also steps in to try and make the lives of many children better by making investment in child welfare to ensure

that our foster care system is protecting our children.

And despite the many difficult issues people are facing in this time of transformation in our province, our cultural lives must be fed with a life force to keep it strong. To this end, over \$600,000 will be allocated toward the urban Aboriginal grants, through Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport.

Budgets are only one tool we have as government to make the lives of our citizens better, but they are a powerful tool. I believe our work is only just begun, but our budget tries to make change and assure support for what we are working for, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The voices of Saskatchewan people are our guiding force. And I believe we have listened, and the result is a budget which will make the lives of Saskatchewan people better. This is why I will not be supporting the amendment, but I will be supporting the budget brought forward by the Minister of Finance.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my remarks I want to make a couple of comments. The first comment that I'd like to make is I want to thank the people who are in the Department of Finance that worked with the government's Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance in putting this budget together. Having been on Treasury Board during our days in government, I know how incredibly hard all of the Treasury Board staff work, along with all of the other people in Finance, and I want to thank them for the work that they've done on behalf of all citizens of the province.

The second comment I wanted to make, I wanted to thank the woman who is the constituency assistant to myself in Saskatoon Nutana, Judy Gossen, along with Darcy Marriott, who provide a valuable service to the people of our province and to the constituents of Saskatoon Nutana day in and day out. And I want to say thank you to them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, here's what's interesting about this budget. The last NDP budget in 2007-2008 had expenditures of \$8.3 billion, \$8.3 billion. The budget that was delivered by the Sask Party government last week contains expenditures of \$10.2 billion. It's a \$1.9 billion lift, Mr. Speaker. In fact if you look at what the Sask Party spent in the last fiscal year that's coming to the end at the end of March, it was \$10.3 billion, up from their estimate of 9.1 billion — 24 per cent lift in two years, Mr. Speaker, 24 per cent lift in expenditures.

Now the members over there say, what should we cut? What I will say to the member is, is that the people of Saskatchewan want a government that is prepared to present a budget that is sustainable in the long term, Mr. Speaker. And this is a government that came into office with an election platform — and I have a copy of it here — that their ongoing expenditures or expenditure growth would be about 3 per cent for the term of their government. Well, Mr. Speaker, 3 per cent over a four-year period is 12 per cent. But if you look at this year alone, this Sask Party government is increasing spending in our province by 12.4 per cent. And if you go back to the NDP's last

budget two years ago, Mr. Speaker, they have increased spending by \$1.9 billion or 24 per cent.

No time in the history of the province have we seen that kind of expenditure growth. Now the members opposite have used, have used a forecast in terms of GDP [gross domestic product] growth in this province of over 2 per cent. And my colleagues have quite eloquently pointed out that there isn't a private sector analyst in the country that has indicated that this province will experience that kind of growth.

[22:00]

There is no one other than the Sask Party government that has predicted this kind of GDP growth, and so we will see whether in fact the members opposite should have relied upon the private sector or should they have relied upon their own predictions. And we know what happened in the 1980s when the Devine government didn't listen to the people in Finance, relied upon their own senses of what was going to happen in this province, and we know what happened in terms of debt and deficit.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also contained in this budget — and these folks really don't want to talk about it — is a projection that we will experience close to \$2 billion in revenue for potash. Now they're predicting that 10.3 million tonnes of potash will be sold in this province this year at a revenue projection per tonne of \$1,071 per Canadian tonne.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I remember — and it's important sometimes to know a little bit about history — I remember in 2006 when our government projected, 2006-07 budget, when our government projected what potash sales would be. But because of a decision by the Chinese to hold out in terms of the contract — there was still negotiations with China — there were lower sales than were anticipated by our Ministry of Finance personnel. And as a result of that, what we saw, and it was stated in the 2007-08 budget, what we saw was about half of the revenue that we had projected in 2006-07 coming in because of the stalled negotiations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a difference about when that decision will be made by the Chinese to buy potash, and I note that Agrium and PCS [Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan Inc.] have a difference of opinion about when this contract might be concluded. Agrium believes that it'll be concluded later rather than earlier. PCS says it'll be concluded earlier.

But the point is that if you look at what's happening in China, the Chinese have some of their own potash that has come into the market in December 2008. They have now deregulated the price of potash in China. This is the internal market price. And we know that the Chinese farmers are experiencing the same kinds of escalating input costs that farmers across the globe are experiencing. And we're not quite sure whether or not Canpotex will be able to get the deal that they want with China, at the prices that they want. And that will have an impact upon our revenue stream, Mr. Speaker.

And when you look at this budget, 20 per cent of the revenues to support the 24 per cent lift in spending comes from potash. Now let's just use the . . . Let's just surmise — and I certainly

hope I'm not correct in this — but let's say in 2009-10 we have the same experience that we had in 2006 where there was a delay in the potash negotiations, and half of the revenue that we had projected for potash, we did not get. We only got half of the revenue that we expected for potash. So let's say the Sask Party is expecting \$2 billion. Contracts are stalled with the Chinese. We don't get the price, or because of the delay we receive half of the revenue. Well, Mr. Speaker, that would put us back in deficit, Mr. Speaker. That would put us in deficit.

And I think that, when I look at what they're projecting in terms of oil, I think that the ministry officials and the minister have been quite conservative in terms of what they projected at \$48 a barrel. But when it comes to potash, I don't believe that we have the conservative estimates that I think in these kinds of . . .

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

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we have the conservative estimates in potash that we certainly appear to have for oil, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I also have had the opportunity to take a look at some of the contents of the budget. And I note that the members opposite are pleased with what is contained in the budget for agriculture.

And I do make this note — it appears as though the Minister of Agriculture's projections for the move of AgriStability to Melville was supposed to cost about \$12 million, according to the minister's initial press release. He indicated when he made this announcement that in '08-09 it would cost about 3.8 million, and in this coming up fiscal year, '09-10, it would cost an extra 8.8 million. Well what we have, stated in the budget, is \$22 million for the move for AgriStability. So it appears as though there are escalating costs associated with this. And it'll be interesting to see why in fact that has occurred given that the program is not projected to begin until 2010.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, they indicate that they have record spending when it comes to AgriStability, and I do note that there appears to be an increase from \$58 million, I think, going up to \$160.6 million. And that's fair enough. But one of the things that we know is that they receive the projections from Ottawa in terms of what our portion of the cost is going to be. And obviously Ottawa is projecting that there are going to be negative margins in the farming community, and that's why we will see a significant increase in the AgriStability program because of those negative margins.

So I don't particularly . . . I know the minister likes to spin this as good news for the agriculture industry. But I would say that while this money will be available for farmers and producers, it appears as though this money is available because they will be experiencing negative margins.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you look at agricultural research, it's disappointing in this budget that there is absolutely no increase in this particular allocation from the Sask Party government — absolutely no increase whatsoever. And in fact that is extremely disappointing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some members opposite have expressed concern about some statements that I made in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix*, in the press, about what's happening to Saskatoon with the decision by the government to reduce education tax on property. Mr. Speaker, once again, you know, if you look at the Sask Party platform, this is one area where the Sask Party completely violated its own platform. Because here's what they said. They said that:

A Saskatchewan Party government will work with school boards and consult with Saskatchewan people to determine the best way to ensure K-12 education is properly funded and that the education portion of property taxes is further reduced.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you know what? Every school board in the province of Saskatchewan was absolutely shocked — shocked — that this government chose to go to a provincial mill rate and take away their ability to have access to the tax system. Now they used the word, they used the word shock. I think that was a word that was used by school boards across the province. They used the word shock, because they weren't anticipating this at all.

So, Mr. Speaker, they didn't consult with school boards. They didn't talk to them about how was the best way to reduce education tax on property. Instead, what they did was they legislated first and consulted later, Mr. Speaker. Now they'll say, oh I met with them, I met with them. Well, so what? You meet with them . . .

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

Ms. Atkinson: — So what? You meet with them. You tell them you're not going to touch it. You're going to give them the ability to tax. And then what happens? You call them into a room at noon and tell them, we're taking away your ability to have access to property taxes and we're going to a provincial mill rate. With a sweep of the hand, they did what they told school boards they were not going to do, Mr. Speaker. I would say that was a promise broken, Mr. Speaker. That was a promise broken.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have talked about my observations when it comes to Saskatoon. Well, Mr. Speaker, my observations are contained in their book, '09-10. I think it's on page 68. Anybody who wants to look at the budget document, it's on the website. Go to the Internet; click on budget document. Go to page 68 of the budget summary, and here's what you're going to find: examples of tax reductions.

Now if you are in Canora, that would be the Minister of Education's riding, and you're a resident, you will see a \$739 reduction on your education tax — 48 per cent, 48 per cent. If you are in Swift Current — that would be the Premier's riding — you'll see a change in your tax levy of \$326.

Now if you are in Saskatoon — Saskatoon, that's where the member from Saskatoon Eastview is from, the member from Massey Place, the member from Meewasin Valley, the member from Riversdale, the member from Centre, and Saskatoon Nutana — what will happen in Saskatoon? It's called a change

in the tax levy of \$100 — \$100. Now once again, once again . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. Order. I'll ask the members to give the member the floor the same respect they expect when they're speaking.

Ms. Atkinson: — Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, some members have shouted, it's not true. Well it's on page 68. It's in their budget document. It says \$100.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in Saskatoon Nutana, there were people that voted for the Sask Party in the last provincial election. And you know, Mr. Speaker, they got a pamphlet — I even have copies at home — from the Sask Party candidate. And you know what that Sask Party candidate, and every Sask Party candidate in the city of Saskatoon said? That the average homeowner with a \$200,000 home — and I think the average price of a home is a bit higher in the city of Saskatoon — would save \$450 a year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not \$450 a year. It's an average of \$100 a year, Mr. Speaker. Now why would that be? Now I know that the Minister of Education, his good folks will receive in Canora an average change of \$739. That's a pretty good cut. I see that Swift Current will get a reduction of \$326 — well that comes close to \$450 a year. And the good people of Saskatoon, on average, will get a reduction of \$100 a year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, two points. They like to talk about the hundred promises they've kept. Let's talk about two that they seem to have trouble keeping. One would be a \$450 reduction in the city of Saskatoon when it comes to your education tax on property — that would be one promise. And the second promise is what they said. They said they would work with school divisions; they would consult school boards; they said they would consult the people of Saskatchewan to determine how best to reduce education tax on property. And, Mr. Speaker, they didn't do it, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've had one constituent contact me to indicate that they have done their calculations on their house and they will see a savings of \$12 — \$12. Their education tax is going down by \$12. Now, Mr. Speaker, it's not \$100 according to the budget document. It's not \$450 according to their election platform. It's twelve dollars, Mr. Speaker, twelve whole dollars. Last year, I think, it was \$27 that they reduced the education portion of taxes, and this year for this particular homeowner, it's \$12.

[22:15]

Well, Mr. Speaker, the other thing that the Sask Party likes to talk about is how affordable Saskatchewan is. Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, once again we have the March 19 release on the consumer price index from Stats Canada. And what did Stats Canada say? Saskatchewan has the highest consumer price index in the country.

And in Saskatchewan, you know what the major factor was? The 22.4 per cent rise in natural gas prices, Mr. Speaker. Now that was the leading cause of the highest consumer price index in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, they didn't do what they said they would do in opposition. They said, when

natural gas prices were going up, let's have rebates. And what did they do in government? Let's not have rebates. Let's give them a 22 per cent increase in their home heating.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are people in this province that aren't making large dollars. There are people that are making modest incomes, Mr. Speaker. There are newcomers that are coming to this province from other places that are making modest incomes. And those newcomers and people on modest incomes are having to deal with escalating costs of rent, escalating costs of home heating, escalating costs of electricity, Mr. Speaker. And it's becoming very, very, very difficult, Mr. Speaker.

Now I know that they're extremely pleased with themselves that they have a budget that does a lot of things, does a lot of things. There's no question about that. But the test of the budget will be, is the spending sustainable. Is it sustainable? Are the revenues that they project, are they going to be there? Because if they're not, Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we're going back to the past — back to the past. When there were people that have clawed their way out of the past to get to the point that we're at in this province where we have reducing debt — not escalating debt, reducing debt.

And I do note, I do note they're very proud of the fact that because of higher commodity prices we've had surpluses that can be used to reduce the government debt, and that's important. So it should be.

But I do note that they are projecting for the first time, for the first time in decades, or in over a decade, that our per cent of GDP and debt to GDP, instead of going down is going to start trending back up. And that is a worry, Mr. Speaker, that is a worry. And the public should be worried about it.

The public should be worried about a 24 per cent spending increase since these people came to office in November 2007. The public should be worried. The public should be worried that they rely 20 per cent of the revenue on potash when we had the experience of 2006 when there were delayed negotiations with the Chinese. It took them a while in order to get that contract, and it cut our potash revenues in half in 2006.

And the public should be worried that this budget is not fair to everybody. And it's certainly not fair to the good people of Saskatoon, of which there are thousands and thousands of homeowners that will, on average, can receive \$1,000 reduction in their education tax. And this is in their own books. They say I don't get it, but I'm relying upon the information that was provided by the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Speaker.

And you know what else the members opposite don't get? What the members opposite don't get is that there are a lot of people in this province that live on modest incomes. They pay taxes, they go to work every day, and they have seen escalating costs associated with the boom, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite don't get that.

And Mr. Speaker, the members opposite don't get, they don't get that Saskatchewan has the highest labour force attachment of young women with children under the age of six who need to work. Oh, and they say, oh we've increased child daycare, and yes they have, Mr. Speaker.

But you know what they didn't do? They didn't increase the parent subsidy. If you look at the Social Services ministry's book estimates, they did not change the subsidy . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . And now they say spend more. Well I will say this: I note you're spending more. It's how you choose the priorities, Mr. Speaker. It's how you choose the priorities.

The Deputy Speaker: — There seems to be a number of members who would like to enter the debate. You will get your turn; respect the member that has the floor.

Ms. Atkinson: — Mr. Speaker, it's how you decide on the priorities. It's who the winners and who the losers are. Well we know this: we have the highest labour market attachment of young women with children under the age of six. We know that they are having difficulty accessing child daycare. In my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, we have seven child daycare centres that have a waiting list of over 800 children trying to get in, because those folks are working, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, not all of them are high-income people. A lot of them are lower and modest income people and when you look at this government's budget when it comes to parent subsidies for those child daycares, not one thin dime more. They're going to create 1,000 more spaces but nowhere are they going to ensure that the parents that might access those spaces have access to parent subsidies, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that the chatterers are busy chatting, but you know what? In this House we get to speak. We get to represent our constituents and my constituents fought long and hard to bring this province back from the brink of bankruptcy in 1991. They gave up a lot and they're watching. They do not, they do not want to go back to the past. They do not want a government that spending is out of control already.

They've only been here 15 months and they've increased spending in this province by 24 per cent and they're relying, they're relying 20 per cent of their revenues on potash when we have the experience of 2006 when there were delayed negotiations; it cut our revenues in half. And that, Mr. Speaker, could have, could have a significant impact on the bottom line.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina South.

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Well once again, Mr. Speaker, the NDP have left us with nothing to work with. It kind of reminds me of when I was growing up in a boarding school, people used to short-sheet you. It's the same sort of feeling all over again, Mr. Speaker. We've got short-sheeted once again by the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure and a privilege to rise in the House today to speak in support of our government's new budget for 2009-2010.

I'd like to begin my remarks with a few sincere thank yous to some very important people. First of all, I'd like to thank the people of Regina South constituency who elected me to represent them. It's a great honour, and I'm reminded of that every single day I serve here in the House. Also like to thank

my wife, Jocelyn, for her constant support.

Special thanks are due to Kyle, my constituency assistant; Doug, Margo, Karalee, Linda, and Morgan in the office upstairs who work very hard — especially Morgan who works every hard; the staff of the Municipal Affairs, true professionals every one of them; and my caucus colleagues; municipal leaders all over Saskatchewan who have come together in an extraordinary fashion to craft major parts of this exciting new budget, Mr. Speaker.

Now in order to provide the proper context for a discussion of the budget, it's helpful to review public reactions to it before we begin. Here's a small sample of what we've read in the press and heard in the news recently, Mr. Speaker.

The StarPhoenix and the *Leader-Post* wrote:

But there were really two things that struck you about this particular budget day [they're referring of course to last Wednesday]: First, to see a provincial government produce a budget with such aggressive spending and property tax cuts, yet still an honest, real \$415-million surplus in such unsettling economic times . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — This is:

. . . as financial officials [have] described it, rather phenomenal. Second [the report goes on to say], the Sask. Party government has now addressed so many long-standing concerns that one really wonders if the NDP has anything legitimately left to criticize.

Well I couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't agree more.

Sadly the opposition Finance critic, the member for Regina Douglas Park, disagrees. He says he doesn't like the budget, Mr. Speaker. On what grounds, we might ask. Well it looks like he has four reasons. First, he has described the budget as runaway spending and calls it a potential fiscal train wreck. Strong words, Mr. Speaker, strong words indeed. Unfortunately he immediately contradicted himself by declaring his personal support for both of the budget's so-called big ticket items.

Of the historic property tax decrease, he told CTV news reporters, well I think some of the government's initiatives are good — initiatives in terms of property tax reduction.

And at his own news conference, when asked his opinion about the new revenue-sharing agreement for municipalities he said, I think we would have landed there too. In fact when challenged by CTV to name specific parts of the budget that he would cut, he couldn't identify a single thing and then chose instead to change the topic of conversation.

The Finance critic's second objection is that he doesn't like the revenue forecast for potash royalties. Others on the other side would agree with him. He has repeatedly claimed that the current temporary cutbacks in potash production must mean an equivalent drop in potash revenues. He doesn't understand it, absolutely. As the members for Kindersley and Meadow Lake

have patiently explained to him, his view is dead wrong. Letters from the most senior officials at the province's biggest potash companies confirm the truth that sales, not production, is by far the biggest factor in potash revenues for the Government of Saskatchewan. Who knew, indeed? Who knew?

I agree completely with my colleagues that it is truly alarming that a former minister of Finance has such a shaky grasp of one of Saskatchewan's most important revenue streams.

The critic's third issue is what he considers to be optimistic projections for the province's GDP provided by the experts at the Ministry of Finance. I find it very disappointing — very disappointing indeed, Mr. Speaker — to note that he is now showing a complete lack of confidence in the very officials who served him so well so recently. And we should remember what the press said about it. Too bad he didn't share his views with the former NDP Finance minister, Jim Melenchuk, when he was predicting 6 per cent growth in 2003.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Time of adjournment having been reached, this House now stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 22:30.]

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