



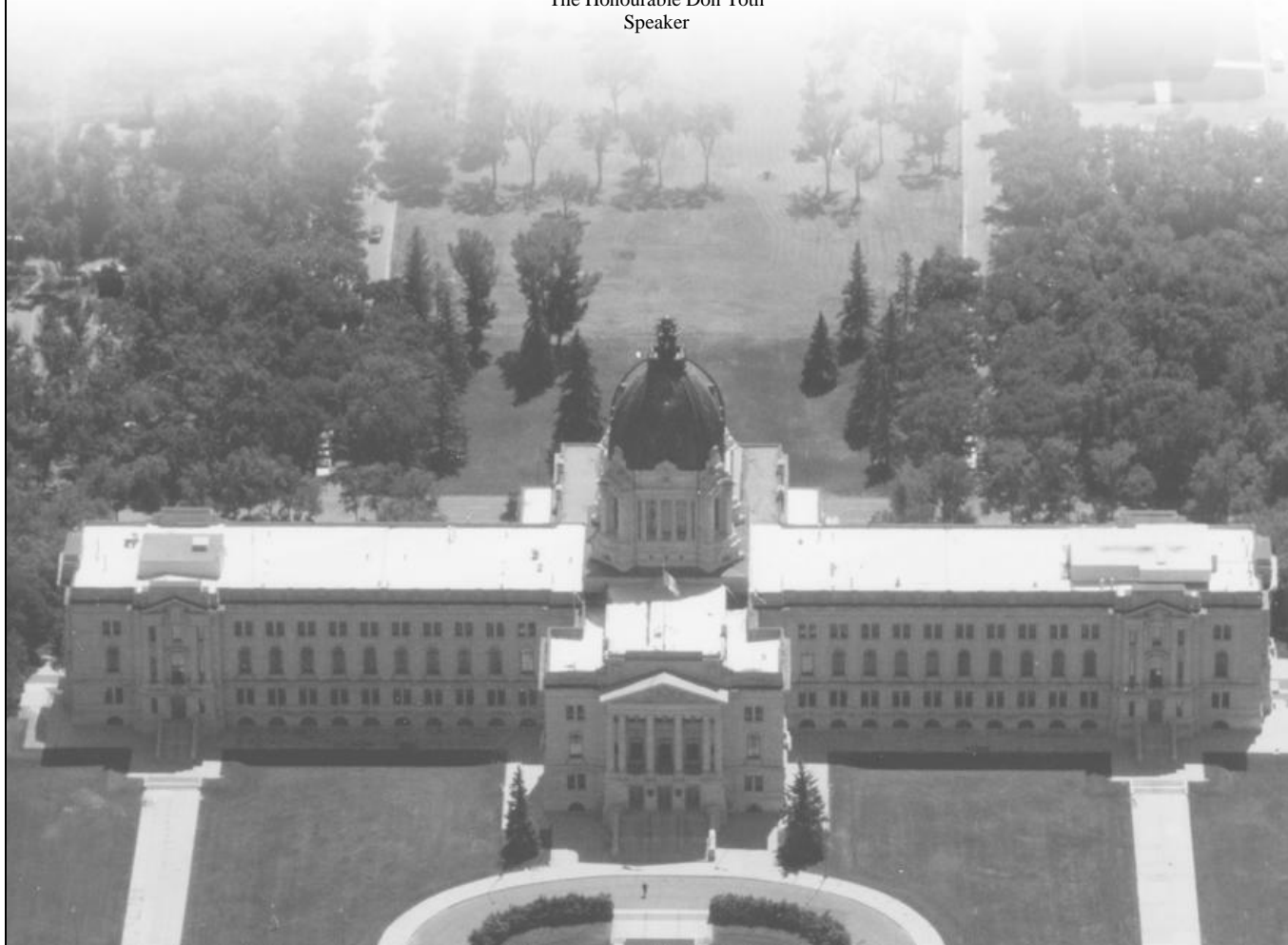
SECOND SESSION - TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

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
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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
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Hickie, Hon. Darryl	SP	Prince Albert Carlton
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Hutchinson, Hon. Bill	SP	Regina South
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Junor, Judy	NDP	Saskatoon Eastview
Kirsch, Delbert	SP	Batoche
Krawetz, Hon. Ken	SP	Canora-Pelly
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McMorris, Hon. Don	SP	Indian Head-Milestone
Michelson, Warren	SP	Moose Jaw North
Morgan, Hon. Don	SP	Saskatoon Southeast
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Nilson, John	NDP	Regina Lakeview
Norris, Hon. Rob	SP	Saskatoon Greystone
Ottobreit, 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
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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 met at 13:30.]

[Prayers]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Ms. Tell: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you and to all members of this Assembly, seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are two fine gentlemen: Mr. Darren Wilcox and Mr. Bernie Eiswirth. And they were kind enough to dress up for the occasion today.

Darren Wilcox is a 23-year member of the Regina Police Service and is currently president of the Regina Police Association. Bernie Eiswirth is executive officer of the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers.

Mr. Speaker, these two gentlemen and part of their larger organizations look after police officers — in times of difficulty ensure that there is proper benefits, adequate benefits to support police officers and civilian members in doing their job.

I'd like all of you to give a warm welcome to these two individuals that are here today to enjoy the festivities and . . . through their Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the official opposition, I'd also like to join with the member opposite in welcoming Bernie Eiswirth and Darren Wilcox to their Assembly.

We in this Assembly all value the important work that the police do within our communities and our society, Mr. Speaker. So on behalf of all of us, thank you once again for coming to your Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Lloydminster.

Mr. McMillan: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce two gentlemen in the west gallery. To you and through you, Mr. Rodney Gopher and Mr. Leo Paul. And as you would know, Mr. Speaker, it's quite rare that gentlemen or school groups come from my part of the world all the way to Regina. So it's particularly a pleasure to welcome these gentlemen who battled the icy roads to get down here. So help me welcome these gentlemen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina

Rosemont.

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you, I rise to introduce an inspiring group of young people. These individuals are founding members of the recently formed organization, Ready Set Vote for Change. I ask each to stand when I recognize and introduce them: Ms. Lori Walker, faculty adviser; Ms. Chantelle Ryerson and Ms. Karissa Angela Jolly. Their goal is to engage and involve young people in the democratic process. And, Mr. Speaker, they're succeeding with over almost 400 Facebook members and delivery of an excellent event last weekend.

I ask all members within this Assembly to welcome these guests to our Assembly.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Carrot River Valley.

Mr. Bradshaw: — Mr. Speaker, to you and through you, I would like to introduce a guest in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Darryl Folkerson. Darryl is in his fourth year of journalism, and he actually has only two more weeks and he's going to be finished his class. And he is writing a story for *The Nipawin Journal* which is up in Carrot River Valley constituency — may I mention the best constituency in Saskatchewan — and he is writing a story on there.

And he's writing a story about following an MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. He's been following me around all day to see what MLAs actually do, and it should be quite interesting. Mr. Speaker, I bought him lunch so he would give us a good story. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Rosetown-Elrose.

Mr. Reiter: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to this Assembly, I'd like to introduce in the west gallery a group of students from Outlook, in my constituency of Rosetown-Elrose. They're the grade 12 class from the Lutheran Collegiate Bible Institute, along with teachers Rick Delainey and Phil Guebert. I hope they enjoy their day at the Assembly and I look forward to speaking with them later. Please ask all my colleagues to please give them a warm welcome.

Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

PRESENTING PETITIONS

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

Ms. Higgins: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition that speaks to the housing market and how it has translated into challenges for renters, which includes senior citizens right across the province, and that more

affordable housing options would significantly help Saskatchewan seniors cope with the cost of living, and especially for those on fixed incomes. The prayer reads, Mr. Speaker:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to act as quickly as possible to expand affordable housing options for Saskatchewan's senior citizens.

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

Mr. Speaker, I so present on behalf of Moose Jaw residents.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of rural residents of Saskatchewan who question why the Sask Party government is leaving them behind when it comes to providing safe and affordable water. Mr. Speaker, the prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to financially assist the town of Duck Lake residents for the good of their health and safety due to the exorbitant water rates being forced on them by a government agency, and that this government fulfills its commitment to rural Saskatchewan.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

These petitions are signed by the good citizens of Duck Lake, Rosthern, and Hepburn. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Taylor: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise to present a petition in support of affordable housing for The Battlefords. The petitioners note that the vacancy rate for rental accommodation in The Battlefords is very low. They ask:

... the Legislative Assembly to call upon the Government of Saskatchewan to invest in an affordable housing program that will result in a greater number of quality and affordable rental units to be made available to a greater number of people throughout The Battlefords and across Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, the petitioners are all from the city of North Battleford.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Broten: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand again today and present a petition in support of fairness for students in Saskatchewan through the expansion of the graduate retention program. The prayer reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to immediately expand the graduate retention program to include master's and Ph.D. graduates.

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

Mr. Speaker, the individuals who signed this petition are students from the University of Saskatchewan as well as students from the University of Regina as well as a number of health care professionals working here in the province who have master's degrees. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition repairing Highway No. 135 that runs through Pelican Narrows, Saskatchewan. This petition is signed by the leadership and the community members of Pelican Narrows First Nations, the village of Pelican Narrows and area. The prayer reads as follows:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Hon. Legislative Assembly may be pleased to cause the government to pave the 7 kilometres of Highway 135 through the community of Pelican Narrows, as committed on August 24, 2007.

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

It is signed by the good citizens of Pelican Narrows. I so present.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

Rock the Vote

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was my pleasure to speak to an inspiring crowd of young people at Rock the Vote, on March 21 at The Distrikt right here in Regina. I was joined by my colleagues from Regina Elphinstone, Regina Dewdney, and with NDP leadership candidates Dwain Lingenfelter, the member from Moose Jaw Wakamow, and Yens Pedersen.

This event offered a forum for political speeches from a non-partisan perspective aimed at discussing the importance of the young generation's involvement in politics. Ready Set Vote for Change hosted this event. This group was created by U of R [University of Regina] professor, Ms. Lori Walker, and a steering committee of inspiring students that includes Ms.

Chantelle Ryerson, Ms. Laura Willcocks, Ms. Teagan Kuhnle, Ms. Karissa Angela Jolly, Ms. Jamie Oakenfeld, Ms. Victoria Patzwald, and Ms. Jillian Wilmot. The ultimate goal of this group is to eliminate political indifference among young people.

Mr. Speaker, I would contend that our young generation is incredibly well prepared for political involvement. I reject the view that young people have no interest in politics. And I believe it is incumbent to embrace and encourage their participation, and for this younger generation to make their mark on the future public policy of our province.

I ask all members of this Assembly to join with me and recognize the important work of this meaningful group whose mantra of We are Change and Let's Get Political is something that we should all encourage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Yorkton.

2009 Canada Cup of Curling

Mr. Ottenbreit: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the sponsorship of SaskEnergy as the official champion of volunteers and Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport investment of \$50,000, the city of Yorkton was full of activity from March 18 to 22 as the city played host to the 2009 Canada Cup of Curling.

Yorkton has an outstanding reputation for hosting highly successful curling events, including the Brier, Olympic trials, and the Tournament of Hearts. At this year's event, fans watched Kevin Martin extend his winning streak, winning 13 straight at the Tim Hortons Brier and his second consecutive win at the Canadian men's championships.

He made the trip to Yorkton where he opened a three-straight, come-from-behind wins before Thursday night's narrow victory. On the women's side, we watched Shannon Kleibrink become the first female skip to win the Canada Cup of Curling twice.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first time the Canada Cup has been hosted in our province. We should all be proud of Yorkton and this great opportunity to showcase Saskatchewan to the rest of Canada and the world.

To quote Shannon Kleibrink:

“Having it (the Canada Cup) in a small town like this, the whole community gets behind it. It was an amazing crowd every single time we stepped on the ice . . . even the morning draws. We're not used to that. It was a great experience for us. [And] We loved it.”

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask members to join me in thanking the more than 200 volunteers who shared their time, energy, and spirit to make this event a huge success. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Saskatoon

Eastview.

Saskatoon Bridge Club

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Saskatoon Bridge Club, located in Saskatoon Eastview, is an important part of the Saskatoon community. The club offers lessons for anyone who is interested in learning the fascinating game of bridge.

The club conducts lessons in a learn-while-you-play approach that takes place in a relaxed atmosphere that focuses on enjoying bridge in a social environment. Community members are always welcome to join in on the fun. It costs \$5 for a game that lasts three hours, which is comparable to any entertainment out there. Club members support one another to ensure that each member enjoys the game while learning a new skill.

Attendance at the Saskatoon Bridge Club does more than enhance your ability to play bridge; it builds personal relationships between community and club members that can last a lifetime.

The Saskatoon Bridge Club is able to teach new members how to play bridge because they have such skilled bridge players within their membership. They are a very active club that encourages people of all ages and abilities to learn the game.

Indeed this game keeps your mind active, as the club has many members that are still playing bridge in their mid-90s. The neat thing about bridge is that it doesn't matter what shape you're in or what level of . . . your physical ability is, you can always enjoy a good game of bridge.

Members participate in tournaments all over the Prairies. If you're interested in seeing just how fun and exciting this game really is, the next local tournament in Saskatoon takes place from April 17 to 19. The hard work and dedication to the game is clearly evident when you get to witness a game first-hand.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Enterprise and Innovation.

Elbow Celebrates 100th Anniversary

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sincere congratulations to the community of Elbow on their 100th anniversary this year. Elbow was incorporated as a village in 1909 when families from eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe settled on the surrounding farm land. It was a typical Prairie village nestled on the South Saskatchewan River until the 1960s when all that changed with the building of dams on the river. Irrigation suddenly became a new agricultural option. Tourists started coming to camp, fish, and boat with the development of Douglas Park.

Today Elbow is a vibrant community that has become a well-known tourist attraction with its proximity to the unspoiled beauty of Lake Diefenbaker. With the development of Harbour Golf and Lakeside Marina, golfing and sailing have become

major attractions as well along with camping and fishing. And thousands of tourists arrive each summer to enjoy the lake and the park.

Yet with all the changes and modern advantages, Elbow remains essentially a quiet Prairie town where neighbours value each other and their way of life. Congratulations to Elbow and its residents on this, your centennial year. You truly deserve to be proud of your town and all your achievements.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Prince Albert Fights Racism and Discrimination

Mr. Furber: — Mr. Speaker, on March 20 I was pleased to attend the official signing between the city of Prince Albert and UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization]. Prince Albert became the 30th community to join UNESCO, the Coalition Against Racism and Discrimination. Mr. Speaker, David Walden, secretary-general of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, said that “. . . by signing this commitment, the city of Prince Albert is making a very public message that racism is not welcome here.”

In January 2009, the Prince Albert City Council passed a motion recommending that the city become a member of the Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination. The city directed its race relations and social issues committee to undertake leadership in this area. By signing on to the coalition, the city has made a commitment to implement its own plan of action for the elimination of racism and discrimination and to report progress of its implementation.

Mr. Speaker, by undertaking this commitment and developing unique plans of action for addressing racism and discrimination, municipalities are encouraged to adopt a participatory approach. This collaborative spirit is already in existence in Prince Albert. Governments alone cannot eliminate racism and discrimination. Participation is required from all sectors and individuals in a community, working together and planning ways in which racism and discrimination can be eliminated.

[13:45]

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join with me in congratulating the people of the city of Prince Albert for joining the Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination, and to the mayor and city council, the PAGC [Prince Albert Grand Council], and the FSIN [Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations] for taking leadership in the fight against discrimination. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Canora-Pelly.

Better Business Bureau Torch Awards

Hon. Mr. Krawetz: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Enterprise and Innovation and I had the pleasure

of attending the fifth annual Better Business Bureau Torch Awards held last night here in the Queen City. The gala event honoured a variety of businesses and individuals in Saskatchewan who have consistently demonstrated a commitment to outstanding ethical business standards. I would like to thank all of the many community sponsors of the Torch Awards. In particular, K-Line Maintenance & Construction deserve thanks for their continued support of this worthwhile event.

Mr. Speaker, there were 123 Torch Award nominees in 2008, and 13 met the Better Business Bureau's criteria of excellence for consideration. In the end, the following seven businesses were honoured last night in seven different categories: Gus's Automotive from Prince Albert; Gaebels Brewhouse & Off Sale, Regina; K-Line Maintenance & Construction, Emerald Park; the Saskatchewan Safety Council, of course in all of Saskatchewan; Brown Communications Group in Regina, Foster's Shoes in Regina, and J.A.B.A Construction Ltd. in Saskatoon.

Guest speaker, Regina Mayor Pat Fiocco entertained guests and enthusiastically spoke about the theme of the Torch Awards and its celebration of positive business and community relationships. His Worship reminded all in attendance that each one of us can be a catalyst of change and that it is up to each of us to contribute to improving the quality of life in our communities.

The Torch Awards recognize businesses and organizations for consistently doing what's right and fair without compromise. Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking the Better Business Bureau for recognizing Saskatchewan businesses and organizations that are working to improve the quality of life in Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Social Work Student Recognized

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, National Social Work Awareness Month presents an opportunity to recognize the hard work and dedication of those members in our community who serve in the helping profession of social work.

Today I wish to recognize Lindsay Holloway, a constituent of Regina Walsh Acres who is currently a social work student at the University of Regina.

Lindsay decided to study social work to, in her words, “break down social barriers attached to income, gender, sexual orientation, race and age that prevent people from realizing a fulfilling life.”

As part of her practicum placement, Lindsay is one of the social work students conducting research for the University of Regina Seniors Education Centre. Focusing on elder abuse, the research project involves the establishment of programs for seniors, health professionals, police officers, retirement planners, and the general public to further advance prevention and recognition

of harm to the well-being and safety of older adults.

In addition to her ongoing contributions to this important research project, Lindsay has also received recognition for her work in the larger community as a former recipient of the Young Woman of the Year Award sponsored by the Gay & Lesbian Community of Regina.

Mr. Speaker, in a society where marked disparity in rewards and opportunities prevent people from being at their best, aspiring, helping professionals like Lindsay Holloway encourage all to work in realizing dignity and justice for those mistreated and left behind. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Forestry Industry

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, last week the minister of forestry was asked by the media if he ever received a report from the task force led by the member for Batoche in 2007. His answer was, and I quote, “Yes, yes, yes.” And then the media asked for a copy of the report. He replied, “I don’t see why not.”

So the minister says the report exists after all. If that is the case, why won’t he share the report with the public? What does the report recommend?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, the report certainly does exist. It was incorporated into the platform document of the Saskatchewan Party in the last election. It talked about a number of things to enhance forestry services, to look at value-added opportunities, to look at cogen, things of that nature that will help to make forestry more viable in Saskatchewan. We are indeed working with the forestry companies to work through that in terms of implementing the recommendations.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — The minister of forestry likes to suggest an announcement is coming but never seems to have anything to announce. Last week he assured this House that there was work . . . that was working with forestry companies, and plants will be opening in the future. After 16 months, forestry workers and their families deserve details, not platitudes. To the minister: which forestry companies is he working with and what are their names?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are talking with virtually all of the forestry companies that I can think of in Saskatchewan on an ongoing basis with respect to the P.A. [Prince Albert] FMA [forest management agreement]. We were talking to them about redevelopment with respect to the pulp mill in Prince Albert. And we’re talking about how we can better utilize the forest that’s out there right now; how we can address the concerns that the industry has with respect to their operations and ongoing forest management services. There is discussions going on with virtually every forestry company and individual forest owner.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Speaker, the crisis in forestry has affected thousands of families in a number of different communities including La Ronge, Big River, Hudson Bay, Meadow Lake, Carrot River, and Prince Albert. Those families want to know one thing — when and if there will be jobs available in the forestry industry in or near their community.

To the minister: the minister says that he has been talking to the forestry companies and plants are being opened. To the minister: where will these plants be opening?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Well, Mr. Speaker, we spoke just yesterday with a forestry company that is looking at operations in Saskatchewan here. I will wait for them to make the appropriate announcement with respect to the decisions that they have made on it. They’ve informed us as to what discussions are going on. They’ve also informed the department as to negotiations that are taking place with other existing forestry companies. But, Mr. Speaker, I don’t think it’s appropriate for us on the floor of the legislature to make the announcements that the companies will be making themselves.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Health Ombudsman

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In opposition the Sask Party continually ranted about the need for an independent health ombudsman. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this was a centrepiece of the health portion of the Sask Party’s 2007 election platform promises. The minister has had 18 months to put a health ombudsman in place. Why has he failed to do so?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to answer that question. Work is being conducted as we speak on where the ombudsman, health ombudsman will be housed. Whether it be housed in the current Ombudsman's office or would be a separate ombudsman all on its own.

But I will tell the member that it has taken us 16 months, and we're still working on it. But in those 16 months, we've had to repair an awful lot of damage after 16 years of NDP [New Democratic Party] government.

The very first piece is human resource shortage. We worked tirelessly for the first 16 months to try and correct 16 years of lack of recruitment and retention initiatives by that government. That was our priority number one, and I think we've done very well so far.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the work would have been done by now. The members opposite have been calling for an independent ombudsman since 1998. After nine years of Sask Party commitments on this topic in opposition, and now 18 months in government, what . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Or 16. What have the people of Saskatchewan got? A broken promise. And now the minister is trying to tell the people of Saskatchewan that he's working on it, working on what it's going to look like.

If the minister thinks an independent health ombudsman is so important, why don't we have one yet?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Mr. Speaker, as I said, yes we are working on it. And I think there'll be an announcement in the near future as to how that will look.

But let me also point out that the current Ombudsman handles a number of health care cases, people that have had trouble with the health care system. Oh I don't know — the Bonderuds, for example, went to the Ombudsman. Even though it was an Ombudsman for all of government, he handles a number of health care cases. We want to highlight that piece and perhaps have a person specifically dealing with health care cases in the Ombudsman's office. That work is being conducted, and we'll be making an announcement in the very near future.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Sask Party's first budget says the creation of an independent ombudsman would cost \$1 million annually. The 670,000 they blew on their ill-advised enhanced driver's licence program would have

almost paid for it.

Mr. Speaker, the independent ombudsman was one of the Sask Party's key health promises to address problems within the health system. What has changed now so that the minister no longer sees the urgency for an independent health ombudsman?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. McMorris: — Obviously that member didn't listen to the first two answers. The work is being conducted. There'll be an announcement in the very near future as to how that will look, Mr. Speaker.

But I can tell you that work within the health care system continues to go on. We have quality of care coordinators that deal with cases on an ongoing basis. The Ombudsman currently deals with cases on an ongoing basis.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're also conducting a patient-first review with Tony Dagnone who is also hearing issues. Mr. Speaker, the biggest ombudsman of the health care system right now is the patient-first review, something that that former government never would look into.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Drinking Water

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, many smaller communities are struggling with the high cost of providing safe water. The members opposite did quite a dance trying to figure out who was responsible for helping out the people of Duck Lake. First, it was the Minister of SaskWater, then the Minister of Environment, then the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Finally it didn't matter because they just decided to blame the town.

To the one of those ministers opposite: have they figured out who is responsible to Saskatchewan people for safe, affordable drinking water, and what has been done to help the people of Duck Lake?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Corporations.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to talk about the provision of safe and reliable water to Saskatchewan communities. It is indeed a priority for this government. It is indeed something that previous governments have looked into.

In fact in this specific matter that the hon. member mentions, the agreement was entered into under the previous administration in May 2006. Costs escalated between May '06 until 2008. Most of the escalation took place in early 2007, again under the members opposite — changes to the way that

the billing was done, Mr. Speaker. Costs have escalated and members opposite should be aware of that because it was done under their watch.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, perhaps he should check with the deputy mayor of the town who informs us that the information of the cost escalation was given to them in September or early October 2007. And if I recall correctly, they were elected in 2007 . . .

The Speaker: — Order. I call members to order. I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — They were in government at the time the decision was made to keep those costs there. Mr. Speaker, Duck Lake is not the only community in the province with water problems.

The town of Hepburn is located north of Saskatoon. Since the early '90s, it has been growing steadily and now has a population of about 700 people. The town has been getting its water from individual wells and other private water sources, but recently traces of uranium and arsenic have been found in the water supply. And now they need an alternative source.

To the minister: does he believe that he and the Sask Party government have a responsibility to help the people of Hepburn access safe and affordable drinking water?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, we are actually taking action on behalf of Hepburn. Under the NDP, they did some limited water testing of private wells within our province. We have actually increased the funding to address five additional communities who are working on private wells — one of those communities being Hepburn. The reason they know there's arsenic and other things in their water is because the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority offered free water testing.

And, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is so concerned about the water situation in Hepburn, perhaps she could explain why, under the NDP between 2001 and 2006, the NDP denied every single MRIF [Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund] that Hepburn submitted.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:00]

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, Hepburn has been denied the first intake of the Building Canada fund, and they've only received

\$57,000 from this \$100 million booster shot from the provincial government. That's not going to go very far. Mr. Speaker, the people of Duck Lake are on the hook for over \$2 million for their water treatment plant and that has caused water rates there to spike from \$32 a month to \$167 a month or more.

Now the mayor of Hepburn tells us that approximately \$6 million is needed to build a water treatment plant to meet the needs of their town. I'm sure those numbers will make it clear, even to the members opposite, that the town of Hepburn is going to need some help building that plant and getting access to clean water. And yet the Sask Party government has still not committed any funding.

To the minister: the people of Hepburn need help. Why is he or she refusing them?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to represent the residents who reside in Hepburn, and I have been asking questions and pursuing options for this community since I was in opposition starting in April 2007 when I posed questions to the NDP Environment minister. And he offered actually not a whole lot of support for Hepburn. I will continue my efforts to find resources for Hepburn.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from a letter that I received on March 16, 2009. And I quote:

Dear Nancy,

Thank you very much for your support of our efforts to bring a clean, safe drinking water supply to the village of Hepburn.

Mr. Speaker, again this side of the House will do what the NDP failed to do and help communities bring safe, clean drinking water to their towns.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Regina Walsh Acres.

Ms. Morin: — Mr. Speaker, the people of Duck Lake and Hepburn are not alone in their struggle to access safe and affordable water. The fact is — and the members opposite are well aware of it — many Saskatchewan communities are facing the same critical issue. Here's another fact: without government assistance, the future of those communities is at risk, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister: with a \$10.2 billion budget and a 12 per cent increase in spending, why didn't the Sask Party focus some of that spending to help Saskatchewan communities struggling to access safe and affordable water?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for the Environment.

Hon. Ms. Heppner: — Mr. Speaker, we have been standing in this House for the last few days discussing the second budget of the Saskatchewan Party government, and perhaps the member opposite hasn't been paying any attention to the dialogue that's been going on in here. Otherwise she would understand what this government has been doing for communities.

We have an unprecedented two and a half billion dollars infrastructure funding that communities can access. We released \$100 million in per capita funding for communities. We have entered into a long-term revenue-sharing deal with municipalities — something that the NDP never got around to, Mr. Speaker. There is Building Canada fund. And, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite were so concerned about this situation, why did they not increase funding to municipalities to meet these needs when they had 16 years to address it?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Auction of Government Vehicles

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, the policy of the Government of Saskatchewan for years has been to auction off surplus vehicles on the SaskSurplus website. People would submit their bid online to the government site and the highest bidder would win. A fair process, Mr. Speaker. On February 25 of this year, the government completed a successful auction of government vehicles on the government website.

To the Minister of Government Services: can he confirm that this is still the policy of the Government of Saskatchewan?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we continue to auction off vehicles. But we're also doing a pilot project, Mr. Speaker, looking at some other alternative means of doing auctions.

We're looking at doing live auctions, Mr. Speaker, to see whether or not we get a better return on our dollar. And we're also looking at doing, Mr. Speaker, a live online auction to see if we get a better return, Mr. Speaker, for these government vehicles which have been very well looked after over their lifetime. But, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at the method that we can get the best return for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, on December 2 of last year the government issued a tender saying, "The Ministry of

Government Services, Purchasing is seeking competitive proposals to provide auction services or other sales method to dispose of 100 government vehicles."

To the minister: when did he change the policy around auctioning off government vehicles by the SaskSurplus website?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the notice that the member opposite is talking about is our first notice for our pilot project, Mr. Speaker.

Government Services has about 5,600 vehicles, Mr. Speaker. We roll them over every year, Mr. Speaker, a certain portion of them. We replace about 700 vehicles a year, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at what method we can use that gives the best return to the people of Saskatchewan. Just because it was done that way before, Mr. Speaker, doesn't mean it's the best way to do it, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, the devil is in the detail. Mr. Speaker, the tender was closed on December 18, but according to the tender site of the ministry, no contract was awarded. Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Government Services: why was this tender closed without being awarded? How many people submitted tenders on this proposal? And what did you do with those submissions?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we're looking at doing is providing the best returns for the people of Saskatchewan. The previous government's method, most people didn't even know the auctions were taking place within Government Services.

Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is going to allow people to have more access and more information. There'll be more opportunities, not just for the people who happen to know how to find the government auction website, but for people across the province who are very used to doing live auctions. Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan are very used to doing online auctions, Mr. Speaker, so the people of Saskatchewan will all have the opportunity. And the Government of Saskatchewan, the people, will get the best returns possible.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, talk about open and accountable, we have a tender sent out, Mr. Speaker, it's never awarded.

Mr. Speaker, on March 12 there was an online auction of 100 government vehicles. These vehicles were on display here in Regina at Suds Car Wash on the corner of Winnipeg and Dewdney in my constituency. But the auction was not conducted on the government website, like all other auctions, Mr. Speaker. This auction was conducted by Hodgins auctions of Melfort, run by former Conservative MLA Grant Hodgins.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: why did the government get a Melfort auction company to do an online auction of cars on display in Regina?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when you're looking to maximize your return on the sale of old government vehicles, you want to use the best people possible. Hodgins auctions is well known across Western Canada for their ability to carry on online auctions, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, they are the people that have the capability of getting the best return possible for the Government of Saskatchewan and for the people of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we have every confidence that these two projects, these two pilot projects, will give us the information we need as to whether this is going to be the best way to get the returns for the Government of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Order. Before I recognize the next speaker, there are periods in time when we're trying to hear a question or trying to hear the response where it's very difficult. And I'm sure it's difficult for our guests. So I would ask members to be mindful of this and respect the right of people to place the question, the minister to respond.

Member from Regina Dewdney.

Mr. Yates: — Mr. Speaker, we know that this process was not tendered properly. The tender was closed without being awarded. We know the government has successfully been doing online auctions for years on the SaskSurplus website. What we don't know is why Grant Hodgins auctions is now performing this service from Melfort.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister: if there was a change in policy, why didn't he tell the people of Saskatchewan? If there was a fair and open tender process, why was the tender closed without being awarded? And why does the government need a Melfort auction company to sell cars in Regina?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the amazing thing about online auctions, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: — If members don't want to pay attention, we'll just cut into question period time. I recognize the Minister Responsible for Government Services.

Hon. Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The comments from the members opposite, perhaps they would have preferred that Eiling Kramer's former auction mart got the tender contract, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when you're looking at an online auction, you're looking at more than just customers surrounding the location where the vehicles are parked. That's why you do it online, Mr. Speaker, to give everybody the option to make a bid, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, you're hoping to attract customers that live more than four or five blocks from the site where the vehicle is parked.

Hodgins auctions is a well-known Western Canada auction mart. They do online auctions all the time. This is a pilot project to determine whether this is an effective and efficient way to get the best return for the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Report on Forestry Sector

Mr. Calvert: — Mr. Speaker, I tell you, what this opposition and what the people of Saskatchewan would like from this government are some answers to some of the questions that are put to them. That's what we'd like.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back over the course of this question period. We started out with a very pointed question to the minister who's in charge of the forest industry in the province. I'm going to re-put that question because I did not hear an answer, and I'm not sure any other member did.

The question was a very simple question. Recently that minister said to the media that he had received a report, a report from the member of Batoche on the forestry sector in this province. The member asked the minister, would he produce that report? That's the question. We'd like to see, the people of Saskatchewan deserve to see the report that was provided to the minister by the member from Batoche.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources.

Hon. Mr. Boyd: — Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the report was received. It was incorporated into the Saskatchewan Party's platform document. It was a very good report in terms of discussions about operations of the forestry sector here in our province. The interesting thing that it did not include, Mr. Speaker, it did not include the NDP's plan.

The NDP's plan was to put \$100 million of taxpayers' money at

risk. Every single person in the province of Saskatchewan and analysts from all over Canada know very well that under the circumstances, under the forestry sector circumstances that we're faced with, with a very, very significant downturn in terms of housing starts in the US [United States], every single dime that the former premier put at risk of the people of Saskatchewan would be gone today.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Transparency in Government

Mr. Calvert: — And, Mr. Speaker, the mill that they promised to open if they were elected is closed today, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Calvert: — The question is transparency, Mr. Speaker. The question's a matter of transparency. The minister says he has a report. He says he's incorporated the findings of that report into his policy, but he won't show us the report. What's in that report that he does not want us to see?

At the close of the questioning today, and the minister responsible for the government vehicle fleet, he tells us there was no tender for this new auction process. There was no open process. We are asking, Mr. Speaker, for openness and transparency from this government, and it is failing.

So my question is to the Premier: will he begin to create a more transparent and open government for the people of Saskatchewan which he promised?

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: — Well, Mr. Speaker, I think an important measure of transparency for a government is this: did they do the things that they said they would do during the most recent campaign?

Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the House, and those candidates who were unsuccessful but I think could be successful next time around, took the platform of the Saskatchewan Party to the doorsteps of the province of Saskatchewan. They took them to small business women and men and said, here are the commitments that we make to you if we are elected the Government of Saskatchewan. I can't imagine a process much more transparent than that.

And do you know the net result of that, Mr. Speaker? The net result of that is after only 16 months, 100 promises in that platform — almost all of them kept.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Wall: — They have been kept. I believe this, Mr. Speaker, that the people of this province accept that this government, this government in 16 months has kept almost all of its election promises with respect to taxes, with respect to

debt, with respect to infrastructure, with respect to supporting those most vulnerable among us, Mr. Speaker. Promises made, promises kept.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[14:15]

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Crown Corporations.

Natural Gas Rates

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise to announce the largest decrease in natural gas rates in Saskatchewan . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan residents' rates will decrease by 21 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That's a savings . . .

The Speaker: — Minister Responsible for Crown Corporations.

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, that's a savings of approximately \$23 per household, on a yearly basis some \$270. Mr. Speaker, worldwide commodity prices have been on a roller coaster for months, making forecasting a very difficult job indeed. Today's lower rate is the lowest SaskEnergy has offered since 2003, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Cheveldayoff: — Mr. Speaker, everyone is aware that the rate for natural gas was increased last fall. Then the unexpected happened — the market price dropped considerably. Rarely have natural gas prices dropped in the winter, Mr. Speaker. While this sounded like good news at the time, we had already purchased our winter supply of gas at the higher price in order to put it into storage during the summer months.

In light of the cost of natural gas declining, many called for a rebate or a rate reduction. But, Mr. Speaker, those changes wouldn't reflect the reality of the day today and would have been a short-lived, ill-conceived subsidy, creating a false sense of economy.

Mr. Speaker, with SaskEnergy's gas cost variance account now in the black, they've applied to the Saskatchewan rate review panel for a reduction in rates. Even while the panel was doing its job, Mr. Speaker, the price of natural gas was continuing to fall, and the panel asked for an update. SaskEnergy's update to the panel decreased to the even lower rate, Mr. Speaker.

Now some individuals from outside of our province believe the rate setting system isn't working. I beg to differ, Mr. Speaker. SaskEnergy's gas price management strategy has helped Saskatchewan residents with the lowest natural gas prices for seven of the last ten years, Mr. Speaker. And it's important to

note that in 2008 — yes, last year — Saskatchewan had the lowest rate in all of Canada. Mr. Speaker, the men and women at SaskEnergy are working diligently to provide safe and reliable service to Saskatchewan residents at the lowest possible cost, and they're doing a good job, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Trew: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have our fair-weather friends across the way — fair-weather friends who, when the temperature goes up, the price of natural gas that they're charging us goes down. When the temperature goes up and we need air conditioning, the price of electricity is going to jump 13 per cent a month after this cruel April 1 joke.

Mr. Speaker, we had one of the longest, coldest winters in Saskatchewan's history. Stats Canada has done a study that shows that Saskatchewan led all of Canada in terms of cost of living increase. And this was done March 19 when they released it, so it's hot off the press, so to speak. And they point out that Saskatchewan had the largest increase and they say, "In Saskatchewan, a major factor was a 22.4% rise in natural gas prices." I add that they kicked in October 1 last year just in time for the cold, cruel winter heating season.

Mr. Speaker, the minister bragged about seven of the last ten years, SaskEnergy having the lowest natural gas prices in all of Canada. I want to tell him, seven of those years, seven of those seven were under NDP administrations — and that's the fact, Jack.

The highest is under the Sask Party government last year. They claim lowest, but they conveniently count all 12 months. They count the natural gas price during the barbeque season, during the air conditioning season, but they don't count it from October to April 1, which is the cold winter season.

Mr. Speaker, it is more than a little bit frustrating. The minister also says this is the lowest natural gas rate since five years ago. I want to remind that member, that minister, and all people of Saskatchewan, five years ago the buy purchase price of natural gas in the world market was close to \$6 a gigajoule. Today it's closer to \$4 a gigajoule. They're matching a \$6 and a \$4 price. It's just bizarre. They've mismanaged it.

For a government that had all of the answers before the election, they've proved that they're nothing but fair-weather friends. Thanks a lot for this April Fool's joke.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 84 — *The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 2009*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister Responsible for Enterprise and Innovation.

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 84,

The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 2009 be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister Responsible for Enterprise and Innovation has moved first reading of Bill No. 84, *The Labour-sponsored Venture Capital Corporations Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. When shall this Bill be read a second time?

Hon. Mr. Stewart: — Next sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

Bill No. 85 — *The Municipal Grants Act*

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

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 85, *The Municipal Grants Act* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister Responsible for Municipal Affairs has moved first reading of Bill No. 85, *The Municipal Grants Act*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill.

The Speaker: — When shall the Bill be read a second time?

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

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

Bill No. 86 — *The Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission Amendment Act, 2009*

The Speaker: — I recognize the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: — Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 86, *The Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission Amendment Act, 2009* be now introduced and read a first time.

The Speaker: — The Minister of Justice has moved first reading of Bill No. 86, *The Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission Amendment Act, 2009*. Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: — First reading of this Bill

The Speaker: — When will this Bill be considered a second time?

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

The Speaker: — Next sitting.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Van Mulligen: — Mr. Speaker, I present the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which I do now lay on the Table.

Mr. Speaker, I will be moving a motion that the report be concurred in at the conclusion of my remarks. I would just like to say that the report before us represents a deliberation by committee members since the establishment of the committee in December 2007, and represents a considerable number of meetings by the committee members. The committee has now considered all items before it, and I am informed that for the first time since 1999, the Public Accounts Committee is caught up with all of the work before it, Mr. Speaker.

We have considered reports by the Provincial Auditor, including recommendations by the Provincial Auditor. The public accounts have been referred to the committee, and we have considered the Provincial Auditor's business and financial plans for two budget years. We have considered and adopted a procedures manual, and we have participated in orientation and educational sessions.

All of this work, Mr. Speaker, would not have been possible without the participation and support of many. And, Mr. Speaker, I think I speak for the members of the committee when I extend our appreciation to all deputy ministers and heads of agencies, who, along with their staff, met with us to answer our questions; to thank the Provincial Comptroller, Terry Paton, and his staff for their attendance and for being a resource to the committee; thank the Provincial Auditor, Fred Wendel, Kim Lowe, the principal from the Provincial Auditor's office, and all other staff from the Provincial Auditor's office for their attendance and presentations to the committee; thank the staff of the committees and staff of the committees branch, Hansard, and broadcasting for their support and assistance, Mr. Speaker.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, a big thank you to the members of the committee and some substitutes for their diligence and participation, including some very good questions. These members are: the member for Carrot River Valley, the member for Cut Knife-Turtleford, the member for Meadow Lake, the

member for Regina Lakeview, the member for Rosetown-Elrose, and especially, Mr. Speaker, the member for Moose Jaw North, who serves as Deputy Chair of the committee. And it is my great pleasure, on their behalf, to move:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be now concurred in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: — The member from Regina Douglas Park has moved:

That the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be now concurred in.

Is it the pleasure of the Assembly to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Speaker: — Agreed. Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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. Gantefoer that the Assembly approves in general the budgetary policy of the government, and the proposed amendment to the main motion moved by Mr. Van Mulligen.]

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

Hon. Mr. Hutchinson: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise and resume debate on the budget of this government for 2009-2010. Now members may recall that my remarks were preceded by an address from the member from Saskatoon Nutana last night. And as I remember it, things were going pretty well for her for a while, and then inexplicably she sat down and didn't get back up again. Now I'm sure she intended to complete her address. I guess she just didn't get around to it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were recalling the fact that the proper context for a budget debate of this sort is to start by reviewing the comments in the press. These are the views of the public looking over our shoulders and judging our work. Here's what the major dailies of Saskatchewan have said:

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 everywhere else is, as financial officials have described it, rather phenomenal. Second, the Sask. Party has now addressed so many long-standing concerns

that one really wonders if the NDP has anything legitimately left to criticize.

Well we also agree with that.

Sadly the opposition Finance critic, the member for Regina Douglas Park, disagrees. And one of the objections that he's raising, Mr. Speaker, is the following. He worries that Saskatchewan's Crown corporations will be borrowing money to invest in upgrading and expanding aging infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing province. Apparently he's unhappy that SaskPower, for example, plans to invest nearly \$1 billion this year to provide electrical capacity for our growing population and our growing industrial base.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Saskatoon Riversdale, stated that the NDP had in fact made very substantial investments of this kind and cited a \$960 million infrastructure investment by SaskPower that they had approved in 2007. Well, Mr. Speaker, we checked the facts; that in fact is not true. The correct fact is that the NDP authorized a mere \$280 million — less than a third of the amount claimed yesterday. That is exactly why we're directing SaskPower to invest almost \$1 billion today.

Mr. Speaker, instead of tying the hands of our valued Crown corporations behind their backs, demanding exorbitant dividend payments, and ignoring their infrastructure needs, we are allowing the Crowns the latitude to properly plan for our province's bright future. As reported in *The StarPhoenix* in an article about borrowing by the Crowns to accommodate growth, the best the former Finance minister could produce was a bit of overwrought hand-wringing and that he "... does himself a great disservice by feigning outrage ..."

The article then explains that the Crowns, "... like their counterparts in the private sector, need to make ongoing investments in plant and equipment required to stay in businesses and need to borrow capital funds ..."

The newspaper's final verdict was, "If the NDP was interested in anything but trying to obfuscate reality and score cheap political points, it would have left this issue alone because it only draws attention to its own record in government."

Couldn't agree more, Mr. Speaker.

Enough about the NDP's questionable understanding and strategy. Let's get back to the budget itself ... [inaudible interjection] ... You'd like me to stay on that? Perhaps we'll revisit it in a moment.

[14:30]

It's an honestly balanced budget, Mr. Speaker, that achieves a surplus of well over \$400 million — 424 to be exact — backed by a cash reserve of nearly \$1.2 billion. It's a budget that keeps a central campaign promise by delivering the largest education property tax savings for Saskatchewan residents in our history, while also providing a very large increase to K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12] education funding. All this in a two-step process that when completed next year will see the province paying fully two-thirds of the total cost, thereby

ending a long, dark decade during which Saskatchewan had the dubious distinction of being the province where education was funded more on the backs of property tax payers than anywhere else in Canada.

This is truly an historic achievement, and certainly one of the most remarkable facts about the program is how quickly it was developed. The excellent report summarizing stakeholder consultations and analysis of funding options prepared by the hard-working member for Rosetown-Elrose and made public on budget day was completed and presented for review in January, right on schedule. Within just two months we have turned it into a visionary program that will result in historic and immediate tax savings to residents and business owners all over the province.

In addition to the obvious advantages of the tax savings themselves, Mr. Speaker, there is another very important, if less realized, benefit. For many years Saskatchewan's municipalities have struggled to keep the municipal portion of property tax competitive with communities in neighbouring provinces, especially Alberta. Without adequate financial support from the previous government to address urgent infrastructure and operations expenses, it's been a very tough job, to say the least.

However, slowly but surely, they've done it. The independent annual property tax survey compiled and edited by the city of Edmonton certainly proves it. Given the enormity of the task, it is of noteworthy achievement indeed. However, when you factor in the education portion of the property tax, our communities dropped to the back of the pack, coast to coast, year after year.

Well, Mr. Speaker, no longer; no longer at all. That unacceptable situation ends today. From now on, the combined municipal and education portions of property tax will be competitive with every jurisdiction in Canada. The result will be that Saskatchewan will be more attractive to new residents and new businesses than ever before. Say hello to more people coming to Saskatchewan to share in our unsurpassed opportunity and to help build our province's future.

Mr. Speaker, this bold initiative is something the NDP should have carried out when they had the opportunity. In fact the concept was first promised by Tommy Douglas in 1944. For three generations and certainly all throughout their most recent 16 years in government they said they intended to do it. They just didn't get around to it. Well we did it in 16 months, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that keeps another key campaign promise by delivering dramatically increased revenue sharing to Saskatchewan's municipalities. At long last, our province's cities and towns and villages, rural municipalities and northern communities have what they have been asking for since 1991 — stable, predictable, and significantly enhanced funding based on the province's own revenues in a way that grows with Saskatchewan's economy.

This milestone development changes everything, and for all the province's residents, wherever they live, it will be better and it will be better immediately. For the first time, their community will have the proper resources for police and fire protection. For

the first time, their community will be able to better address road repairs and snow removal, sport and recreation programming, park development and open space management, transit and paratransit services, access to arts and culture, in fact all of the other services residents depend on every single day.

For the first time, their community will be able to confidently plan for the future in the sure knowledge that the government of the day will no longer cut funding on a whim, without consultation and without warning.

Since the provincial election in 2007, Mr. Speaker, we've heard the opposition talk about revenue sharing; we've heard them talk about it a lot. The opposition critic for Municipal Affairs, the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow, has often said that their government was this close to a revenue-sharing deal before the election. Holding your thumb and first finger just a tiny fraction of an inch apart — we were this close, she often said.

Is that so, Mr. Speaker? Municipalities see it differently. They know that the previous government had only sat down with representatives of the cities. Saskatchewan's towns and villages, rural municipalities and northern communities weren't even asked to be at the table. That's not close, Mr. Speaker.

And the discussions that they had, had only advanced as far as to sort out what services were provided respectively by municipalities and the province. Talk of a provisional source of revenue and an amount never even happened. Mr. Speaker, that's not close at all.

The opposition had 16 years to get the job done. And I think they intended to do it. They didn't get around to it. In fact the member from The Battlefords, the former minister of Municipal Affairs said here in this House, on April 18, 2005, "The municipalities have indicated they want a predictable and a sustainable revenue-sharing formula. So does this government." They just didn't get it done, Mr. Speaker. This government has completed the task they left unfinished.

Now the dollars that are being provided as part of this new arrangement are themselves also historic. Based on the new budget's allocation of money — equivalent to 90 per cent of one point of PST [provincial sales tax] revenues as recorded in the most recent audited statements — revenue sharing will total more than \$167 million, an increase of almost 40 per cent since the new government came into office.

Next year, when the allocation increases to the equivalent of a full 1 per cent of PST, the total amount of financial assistance is estimated to be approximately \$215 million, a truly phenomenal increase over anything ever provided by the former government.

How we got there is in itself an interesting story, Mr. Speaker. It begins with consultation, open communication, ongoing dialogue, and a lot of work by our municipal partners. Today's results are in fact truly a testament to the power of this relationship and also a testament to the dedication and hard work of our municipal sector partners. They deserve our thanks.

Mr. Speaker, let's turn our attention now to infrastructure, and unfortunately we have to begin with a very sad history lesson

here. Back in the 1980s, shortly after the revenue-sharing program was introduced, municipalities had a source of provincial funding that allowed them some flexibility in meeting their infrastructure needs. However during the 1990s, the NDP government shamelessly clawed back over two-thirds of \$1 billion from the revenue-sharing pool. The inescapable result of this heartless policy was that the ability of communities to pay for much-needed infrastructure investments was crippled. That's where the infrastructure gap facing municipalities came from, Mr. Speaker; the NDP created it.

To put this relentless attack on the province's communities into perspective, the opposition critic for Municipal Affairs, the member for Moose Jaw Wakamow, personally voted to deprive the residents of her own city of Moose Jaw of something like \$20 million. In doing so she showed the people she was elected to serve that safe, clean drinking water for Moose Jaw families wasn't as important as buying a potato business that ultimately failed. In doing so she proved that proper waste water treatment and an adequate landfill facility for Moose Jaw wasn't as important as buying money-losing dot.com companies around the globe. And in doing so, Mr. Speaker, she proved that grid roads for the people of Moose Jaw weren't as important to her as buying into poorly researched foreign businesses, that once again bled red ink. Mr. Speaker, what a shameful legacy — a shameful legacy indeed. I think she has some explaining to do to her constituents, and in fact to the people of this great province.

As I mentioned a moment ago, Saskatchewan's new provincial government has just provided communities with \$100 million in new funding for infrastructure under the municipal economic enhancement program or MEEP for short. It's the municipal portion of the \$500 million economic booster shot announced by the Premier on February 2. And this \$500 million is part of the unprecedented \$2 billion invested by this government in important infrastructure projects, including \$1 billion in the current budget. To put that into perspective, in their last five years as government — including the 2007 pre-election budget, with a deficit as big as our current surplus — the NDP only spent an average of \$500 million a year. The difference, Mr. Speaker, is staggering. But there's more, Mr. Speaker, there's much more.

Municipal leaders also told us they needed help to meet the challenges of unprecedented economic growth. They told us they were prepared to invest in their own communities to provide serviced lots for residential, commercial, and industrial construction. They told us they were ready to expand their utilities to plan for the future. What they asked for was help to make it a bit more affordable to make this investment possible.

Mr. Speaker, we responded and, together with the Saskatchewan Municipal Board, the Municipal Finance Corporation, and our municipal partners, we designed and rolled out the Saskatchewan infrastructure growth initiative or SIGI for short. This program provides municipalities with five-year, interest-free loans for lot development and related off-site infrastructure including water, sewage, and landfill facilities.

Members of the opposition questioned the significance of this program by suggesting that municipalities were in such good

financial shape that they could fund their own borrowing costs, that SIGI was merely icing on the cake, Mr. Speaker. Well we disagree. Mr. Speaker, in the first year the program facilitated projects worth almost \$80 million in 35 communities, and the new budget includes funding for a second year's program during which we anticipate assisting with a further \$78 million in project value which will be announced shortly.

There is even more. As partners with our colleagues in municipal and federal government, we're helping to finance the Building Canada fund. Already 46 projects totalling over \$95 million have been funded and approved for immediate construction in communities all over Saskatchewan. And a second round of applications is now under way with clear expectations that dozens more worthy projects will be funded in the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, there's just one more item that I'd like to mention from the budget and that's paratransit. The paratransit program was frozen in 2002 by the members of the opposition, and they didn't increase it in 2003 or '04 or '05 or '06 or '07, despite repeated requests from communities and individuals like myself. Every year we went to the provincial government and asked for assistance, and every year we were denied. We know that this delivers much-needed services to folks with disabilities in communities all over the province, and we're delighted to be able to support it with more money in this year's budget. High time, Mr. Speaker, high time indeed.

Mr. Speaker, this budget works because, as the member for Lloydminster so eloquently said, it is based on optimism, enthusiasm, and innovation. It works because it is guided by clear priorities including prudent financial management, managing growth carefully and responsibly, keeping Saskatchewan's economy strong and steady, and keeping promises like historic reductions in education property tax along with unprecedented investments in health care, education, child welfare, and our province's communities. It builds on the good work which preceded it, including eliminating nearly 40 per cent of the provincial debt, the largest income tax in our history, returning \$300 million per year to Saskatchewan residents, and dropping 80,000 low-income earners off the tax rolls altogether, along with the largest investments in infrastructure ever.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude by summarizing the comments of the budget from our valued municipal sector partners. In a couple of words, they are: thank you for listening; thank you for acting. We are pleased. In fact we are excited. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm excited too, and that's why I won't be supporting the amendment. I will be supporting this province's excellent budget.

Now to conclude, Mr. Speaker, in a spirit of true bipartisanship, I extend the hand of friendship to my sisters and brothers across the aisle on the other side of the floor, and ask them to vote with their hearts. I know that there are a number of them that are thinking strongly of supporting this budget. The Leader of the Opposition will recognize that this budget includes the kind of capital investments that Crown corporations should have been making all along. I think he's going to vote for the budget.

The opposition critic for Finance . . . [inaudible interjection] . . .

They're not going to vote for it? Well I'm disappointed to hear that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I saw the member from Regina Lakeview get on his feet the other night and say that the budget made him uneasy. I know the problem. He's thinking, should I vote for my party or should I vote for my constituents? Should I vote against the budget or should I vote for it? I think he's probably going to come around and vote for the budget because he recognizes it's the right thing to do. I urge all of the members on the opposition to come to that conclusion. Vote from their hearts. Vote for the constituents. Vote for the budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to rise in this House today on behalf of the remarkable residents of Saskatoon Greystone, and speak in favour of the strong and steady budget that has been delivered by my colleague, the Minister of Finance. I deeply appreciate the ongoing support of constituents within Saskatoon Greystone — a dynamic, vital, and cosmopolitan constituency.

It's a pleasure to be able to enter the debate today regarding the '09-10 budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how the ministry I have the honour of serving, how this ministry's budget will contribute to this government's overall goal of a Saskatchewan that is both strong and steady.

While there remains much to do, I am pleased with our government's work in the accomplishments and successes that the ministry has to offer over the last year. We've made contributions to a Saskatchewan, a Saskatchewan that while we know is not immune from global pressures outside, still has a place of remarkable and resilient economic strength.

While we recognize that we are not immune from those forces outside, the leading economists have been talking for months about Saskatchewan's economic performance, both within and beyond in international context. Recent labour force survey numbers from Stats Canada demonstrate that Saskatchewan continues to post relatively strong employment growth. The numbers are as following: 14,500 more people working in Saskatchewan in February compared to a year ago — an increase of 2.9 per cent, the strongest rate of growth of any Canadian province.

[14:45]

A growing number of women who have joined our province's workforce, that is making our workforce more inclusive. In fact women accounted for nearly all employment growth in Saskatchewan over the last 12 months, with the number of working women growing by 15,300, or 6.6 per cent. And First Nation and Métis employment is up 3,500 over the past 12 months. That reflects a solid six-month trend of continuous employment growth for our First Nation and Métis communities.

So while we continue to take a balanced and prudent approach

to managing both the immediate and longer term needs of our economy and of our labour markets, of our communities, we are doing so from a position of relative strength. It is that very economic strength, both current and projected, which has enabled our government to bring in another balanced budget. And it is at the same time that strength that is driving our government's long-term economic vision for communities and people in this province.

Regarding the specific budget for the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour: the ministry provides an overall lift of 79 million, or 10.4 per cent, for a total budget of \$840 million. Addressing our talent challenge is one of the cornerstones of our ministry's measured and balanced approach to a strong and steady Saskatchewan. We've talked a lot over the last year about how critical it is that we build a vibrant, skilled workforce and reinforcing communities that are equally vibrant and dynamic.

I would also like to take some time now to discuss the balanced approach we are taking to help achieve our broader objectives. Regarding First Nation and Métis peoples, we are focusing on improving education and employment outcomes for our province's First Nation and Métis peoples. Not doing this in isolation, Mr. Speaker, but working with other ministries, most especially the Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations, to ensure that we have a coordinated, comprehensive approach.

The ministry is developing a First Nation and Métis involvement and inclusion strategy. This will ensure that the investments we make, the partnerships we build, and the programs we support are strategic, coordinated, and above all, collaborative as we focus on effective outcomes.

Budget '09-10 also provides continued support for a number of important initiatives: \$5.9 million in funding targeted to Aboriginal workforce development in support of First Nation and Métis employment initiatives; continued ongoing operating and program funding to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. This is in addition to the \$2 million in capital funding that we announced recently for SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] as part of last month's \$500 million accelerated infrastructure booster shot. This funding to SIIT represents the first ever infrastructure support from the provincial government to this institution.

Continued operating and program funding to the Gabriel Dumont Technical Institute, the Saskatchewan urban native teacher education program, and the northern teacher education program; continued operating funding for First Nations University as we continue to work with that university and other partners on issues of governance to ensure that First Nations University is better positioned to meet its full potential; continued funding for adult basic education, and skills training on-reserve through regional colleges and SIIT; and investments, both public and private, specifically federal and provincial, for ongoing training and skills development opportunities for First Nation and Métis peoples in northern Saskatchewan through the Northern Career Quest partnership. I'm pleased to note that I understand a new corporate partner will actually be coming on shortly, Mr. Speaker, to help further extend the benefits of this program.

Our government and the ministry recognize the vital role that First Nation and Métis peoples play in ensuring Saskatchewan's economic success. We will continue to take steps that will ensure people across this province, especially First Nations and Métis peoples, that these peoples have the enhanced opportunities to participate in and benefit from the economic growth that's under way in our province.

Regarding post-secondary education, of course we're also focusing on post-secondary education as part of the continuing commitment to students and scholars, instructors and professors, and institutions. In the coming months, the ministry will be working with our post-secondary partners to help develop a new vision for post-secondary education in Saskatchewan. And while we're working on that vision collaboratively, we will continue to invest in our province's post-secondary education, institutions, and learners. This year we will be investing more than 600 million in post-secondary education and training programs and of that, 623 million specifically is going directly to Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions.

I'll come back to speak about the institutions, but I want to address specifically a question that has come up in this House regarding our tuition management strategy. Let me lay out some of the key elements of this, that is increased operating funding to Saskatchewan's universities and other advanced educational institutions; as well, infrastructure renewal and expansion. You can see that within the budget. We've said there's a commitment as far as reasonable rates of tuition. Mr. Speaker, this is consistent with what's going on across Western Canada. The rationale for this is, it's vital to support our students, but also to support our institutions. This is a much more holistic approach to helping meet those dual goals.

Then we've added — and I'll speak in more detail to this in a few minutes — enhancements to student loans, some of which for the first time since the 1990s. And the graduate retention program, we've seen an expansion and we've put in additional dollars.

We're making capital investments to ensure that post-secondary institutions have the facilities necessary to provide training opportunities to the people of our province. I recently announced \$26.35 million in infrastructure funding for St. Peter's College; Great Plains College; SIAST [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology], where there was \$7.85 million to support the expansion of training opportunities in nursing, plumbing, carpentry, and other trades at Wascana and Woodland campuses. And as I've mentioned already, we've made an infrastructure investment, the first one of its kind, at SIIT.

My colleague, the Minister of Social Services, recently announced a significant investment in student housing at the University of Saskatchewan. This is truly significant, as the former government did nothing on that campus. This was evident in the early 1990s, when I arrived on that campus, that there was plenty of work to do. Absolutely delighted that the Minister of Social Services, the member from Humboldt, made sure that this investment went forward.

Budget '09-10 provides a total of 60.8 million in capital funding

to renew, rebuild, and grow the province's post-secondary infrastructure, including 25.1 million for universities and colleges for continued facility management for sustaining capital — a 12 per cent increase over '08-09. Mr. Speaker, new funding of 1.8 million for regional colleges to address increased costs; 4.4 million for renovations to accommodate health care program expansions; 5.4 million to Cumberland Regional College in Nipawin for their renovations and to develop a centre of literacy, workplace essential skills, and adult basic education; \$4 million, an increase for Carlton Trail Regional College to relocate into the new high school located in Humboldt; \$9.8 million of capital funding from the '09-10 budget for the international vaccine centre at the University of Saskatchewan.

In regards to our student supports — as I've highlighted before, this is consistent with our broader tuition management strategy — 23.5 million in new funding to enable universities to limit tuition increases to an average of 3 per cent, a modest increase by any measure when compared across Canada. In partnership with the federal government and private partners, we're providing over \$470,000 for the expansion of the Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems, or MITACS, to allow for 21 students to participate through scholarships in this initiative. MITACS is a partnership program for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to participate in applied research and development internships.

We're implementing as well the new Saskatchewan Scholarship of Honour, as has been raised in this Assembly previously; 2.8 million to index the provincial training allowance for shelter and energy costs.

\$2.2 million in new funding for student loan enhancements to provide grants for low- and middle-income students in one-year programs and to low-income families with dependents, to increase the provincial maximum weekly loan limit to \$140 per week of study, and to increase the Saskatchewan Student Bursary to maintain debt levels of \$210 per week of study. These changes coordinate the Saskatchewan student loans program with the Canada student loans program, something that wasn't done in 2005 and has not been done since 1994. We are listening to the needs of students and addressing their concerns.

And on this note, I thought it may be worthy of addressing to help ensure that there's a clear historic record because on November 27, 2008 the member from Saskatoon Meewasin rose in this Assembly and made reference to a student day of action held on February 28, 2008 at the U of S [University of Saskatchewan] campus. In reference to my own participation in this event, the member opposite charged, the Minister Responsible for Advanced Education did not attend; he did not attend. The member from Meewasin went on to say that the minister does not like to attend events where he has to answer questions.

To clarify on February 28, 2008, the day in question, I was on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. I spoke at the invitation of an instructor regarding public policy to a class. That day I fielded questions directly from students and faculty, including about housing, and there was none other than the Hon. Chris Axworthy in the audience who helped raise some of those very questions. Later that day, I met with members from

the U of S Students' Union to directly address their concerns where I asked for additional empirical support for the positions that the students were putting forward.

To go even further, on February 2 of this year, I was again at the University of Saskatchewan where the Students' Union presented a copy of the U of S student housing report. This report was then extended to His Worship, the respected mayor of Saskatoon, the honourable Don Atchison, and myself.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that within 48 hours the assignment was complete. My honourable colleague announced a \$15 million contribution to a new student housing initiative on the campus.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Norris: — Our government is not stopping at supporting our students at graduation. We're helping them to succeed within our province. With this goal in mind, we have dedicated \$18.5 million to rebate tuition costs through the expanded graduate retention program, 6.5 million of that is new funding for '09-10, and \$400,000 to the repayment assistance program to help students struggling with repayment after graduation.

And we're working to do even more by working with the federal government on two important fronts. First on the infrastructure stimulus that Ottawa has announced where we're working with post-secondary institutions in preparing proposals for the new \$2 billion knowledge infrastructure initiative, decisions about which the federal government will announce in the near future.

And second, on additional employment and educational initiatives which will be announced in the coming months through the labour market agreement and the Labour Market Development Agreement. Those are both run through HRSDC [Human Resources and Skills Development Canada], regarding employment opportunities.

Now let's take a look at some specific program initiatives we're undertaking to increase employment opportunities: \$7.9 million in funding is targeted for training seat expansions for registered nurses, psychiatric nurses, medical diagnostic professionals and physicians in partnership with institutions and the Ministry of Health.

The JobStart/Future Skills initiatives continue to be an important mechanism to address worker shortages. And budget '09-10 provides an ongoing investment of \$19.4 million to support it.

The budget also provides for the funding to allow us to name the \$3.5 million mid-year increase for nearly 1,100 additional apprenticeship seats. We will also continue to deliver targeted initiatives for older workers to assist unemployed older workers to re-enter the workforce and deliver workplace essential skills — a Saskatchewan pilot — to provide funding for industry and post-secondary partners to assist job seekers and existing employees to build their essential skills and enhance their career development.

We are also importantly supporting adults with disabilities through the employability assistance for people with disabilities program. We will do this by giving priority to students with disabilities and the Student Employment Experience program and the Canada-Saskatchewan student grant for the accommodation of students with permanent disabilities.

At the same time, we will pursue new partnerships with sector groups and employers for workforce recruitment initiatives and explore improvements and enhancements to the saskjobs.ca.

Attracting newcomers is another area of focus. During the next fiscal year, we will continue to attract newcomers and we'll see more about this tomorrow. This year we are undertaking an immigration strategy and enhancement to help respond to the demographic and labour needs of the province and to help ensure that we're building more diverse, dynamic, and cosmopolitan communities.

As well, we're also focusing on attracting additional economic investment to help build this new Saskatchewan. This includes an investment of an additional \$2 million in '09-10 with a focus on newcomers, with specific reference to immigrant entrepreneurship and to provide more opportunities to attract investors and newcomers to Saskatchewan. The new business immigration programs will include an Aboriginal immigrant investor initiative and business succession initiative.

These programs will grow the province and create jobs by linking immigrant investors with First Nation and Métis communities. Other priority elements of the strategy include targeting 3,400 nominations for '09-10, or potentially 9,600 new immigrants through the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program.

[15:00]

Mr. Speaker, let me give some reference to that. Between 2001 and 2006, under that last government, barely 8,000 people came to Saskatchewan through both federal and provincial programs. In 2009, Mr. Speaker, we anticipate that there will be 10,000 people arrive in Saskatchewan through immigration.

A new settlement and integration delivery model which will more effectively respond to increasing immigration. A new international education council to promote a coordinated approach to international education in the province. Working with partners to develop a sounder regulatory environment that better protects newcomers and ensures immigrant processes that are fair and transparent for our newcomers.

Regarding community-based organization, we are also investing in community-based organizations which provide important services to Saskatchewan people. These CBOs [community-based organization] will see a further 3 per cent basic increase over and above the \$5 million announced in last year's budget and the September 2008, 7 per cent increase.

Regarding the labour environment, our government continues to look at Saskatchewan's labour environment. Part of attracting and retaining a skilled workforce and building stronger communities is ensuring Saskatchewan is attractive regarding work and investment. On the legislative side, we recently tabled

amendments to *The Construction Industry Labour Relations Act* to expand the choices available to workers and employers and providing greater clarity for those involved in industry. This will help to ensure that our construction industry operates under fair, flexible, and effective labour laws.

And while I'm on the subject, Mr. Speaker, I noted with some concern the meandering remarks from the member from The Battlefords during last week's adjourned debate. Not only did the member struggle to comprehend the nature of the changes, but in a telling turn of phrase, the hon. member demonstrated his lack of understanding of the existing legislation that his NDP government put in place so many years ago.

Last year we lowered the minimum age of employment in five sectors — hotels and restaurants, educational institutions, hospitals, and nursing homes — as a pilot to be reviewed this year. And we are currently engaged in the public and stakeholders through a consultation process to help inform that review.

The ministry will also continue to foster occupational health and safety compliance and best practice strategies to help reduce injuries and increase productivity in all sectors.

Workplace safety continues to be an issue of critical importance to this ministry and to this government. An increasingly focused effort will be brought to bear on both public and private sector initiatives to enhance the WorkSafe Saskatchewan partnership, an initiative to identify and address workplace hazards and eliminate work-related injuries and illnesses.

Regarding service integration, beyond all of the key investments and initiatives I've already mentioned, Advanced Education, Employment and Labour is also undertaking an initiative to provide better service to the people of Saskatchewan. We are better aligning ourselves so that when clients come through our doors, they can get information about a number of different issues through one visit to one office. Through service integration, we're making important progress on taking a common sense approach to client service by coming at it from the client's perspective.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, as you can see within the balanced and prudent approach that we've laid out in this budget, this will be a year of solid investments and initiatives within our ministry and across our government. The funding and initiatives we have identified will not only build a skilled and talented workforce, they will help make life better for Saskatchewan's people.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to serving the province, and we look forward to ensuring that the benefits of our strong and steady Saskatchewan are shared right across this province. It goes without saying, Mr. Speaker, I support firmly and fully this budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very happy to

enter the debate on the budget today. I want to talk about the people in Eastview, people in Eastview who have continued to display their confidence in me as their MLA. This is the fourth term, and I'm happy to serve my constituents.

To my constituency assistant, April Anderson, who runs my office so effectively, serving everyone in the constituency — people remark on how accessible and how effective she can deal with their issues. To my family who support me in the political arena, I want to say thank you: to my husband, Don, who lives the political life with me; to my son, Sean, and my daughter, Heather, and their families; to my grandchildren who make this life bearable, and always entertain me and keep me young.

We often have to put our jobs ahead of our families, and I thank them for allowing me to do that, and to support me through all these years. I want to particularly thank my mother who's 83 years old and who campaigns with me. In fact sometimes she's ahead of me, and has often said, you know, if I'm going too fast for you, I'll slow down. But she continues to be one of my biggest supporters and I rely very heavily on her support as I do my whole family.

My comments today are going to talk — since we've got a shortened time — my comments today on the budget are going to talk about how the budget is based on false assumptions. We've heard that from many of my colleagues. Some of the key messages in the budget, the things that we're basing our assumptions on — the price of potash, some of the things that we hope to see in the economy, the predictions for economic growth — are not necessarily going to be there. So the budget is based on hope — hope that these things will happen. And all of us as citizens of Saskatchewan hope that they do happen.

We're happy to live in a province that has been insulated somewhat from the economic catastrophes that are befalling even other provinces around us. And a lot of that insulation has occurred over the years with strong and forward-thinking planning on behalf of our party when it was in government. We've set the stage; we've set some of the protections; we've set the economic climate. And time and money has allowed the Sask Party to put together a budget that they've shown last week. Not really much on philosophical, big changes. A lot of things have to do with money and the province has a lot of money. A lot of it to do with the initiatives and programs that were put in place by the NDP when we were in government.

Being the Health critic, I would like to talk a little bit about what the impact of this budget has on health and the health system. A lot of the money going into the health system is going into infrastructure and, granted, the infrastructure in the health system, as it is across the province in highways and schools and many other things, has been deteriorating in this province as has most municipalities, most provinces across the country, simply because there was no money.

All through the '90s there was no money. Provinces were struggling to get out of debt and out of deficit budgets. There was no money. But interestingly enough . . . And I'm going to read this into the record because I'm really kind of tired of hearing about how we did nothing. And here's what we did with nothing. We built — this is the NDP when we were in

government — since '91, from '91 to 2007, built 30 long-term care facilities — 30 — with no money, struggling to make choices to give some tax cuts, to build some hospitals, to build some schools.

For the Minister of Health and other people standing up saying, you've done nothing for long-term care, well that's not true. Here is 30 facilities. This is from the minister's office; I'm not making these up. These are from the minister's office in their written question answered.

I'm just going to read a few. Eastend, Wolf Willow Health Centre in Eastend. Assiniboia Union Hospital Integrated Facility in Assiniboia. Davidson and district health centre in Davidson. Unity & District Health Centre in Unity. La Loche Health Centre in La Loche. Parkland Place in Melfort. Foyer d'Youville in Gravelbourg. Providence Place in Moose Jaw.

St. Joseph's Health Centre in Macklin. La Ronge Health Centre in La Ronge. Riverside Health Complex in Turtleford. Mont St. Joseph Home in Prince Albert. Balcarres integrated health care centre in Balcarres.

Long Lake Valley Integrated Facility in Imperial. Silver Heights Special Care Home in Raymore. Wynyard integrated facility in Wynyard. Moose Mountain Lodge in Carlyle. Galloway Health Centre in Oxbow. Tatagwa View in Weyburn.

Kamsack & District Nursing Home in Kamsack. Yorkton & District Nursing Home in Yorkton. Sherbrooke Community Centre in Saskatoon. Coronach Health Centre in Coronach. Craik & District Health Centre in Craik.

Grasslands Health Centre in Rockglen. Lady Minto Health Centre in Edam. Montmartre Integrated Health Centre in Montmartre. St. Mary's Villa in Humboldt. St. Joseph's Hospital in Estevan. Wheatland Lodge in Leask.

This is something we've never done . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Well these are from the minister's office, answers to the question: how many facilities have been built? This is supplied by . . . The Sask Party gave us those answers.

So what really bothers me about the budget, other than the fact that there's false assumptions in there which should bother everybody, is that in the document — and I forget what this is called here — the budget summary '09-10, in the green part, one vision for government, government's goals says, "Keep Government's Promises and fulfill the commitments of the election, operating with integrity . . ."

Well I don't see it. Frankly, when I hear comments made that are clearly not true, I wonder how you can possibly say you're ". . . operating with integrity and transparency . . ." and you're ". . . accountable to the people of Saskatchewan."

Well the people of Saskatchewan need to know the things that we hear are not true. When you talk about doing nothing, obviously I've read 30 communities who have got long-term care facilities. That's just an example I picked to show that this is not dealing with the public with honesty and integrity and transparency.

Another one which is particularly dear to my heart is the children's hospital. And I know how much the children's hospital is needed. There's no disputing that. I'm an obstetrical nurse and a grandmother who had two grandchildren in the NICU [neonatal intensive care unit]. I understand how sick children can tear at your heart and what we need in this province.

But I have news releases from May 2006, starting in May 2006, when the minister at the time, the member from North Battleford, announced the funding to start the planning of the children's hospital. We've gone through May 2006, May 2005 even, farther back than that. My colleague from Lakeview announced that this government, the NDP government at the time, supported building a children's hospital.

This was not something that the Sask Party thought of on budget day, and announced it. This was not something that was new. We're talking May '05 when this was announced. Then we're talking May '06, we've added more money in the budget. And April '07, "Planning on the children's hospital has progressed to the point where the preferred location and general parameters can be announced." News release — not something I'm making up. "Plans are to have a project proposal that can be considered for the 2008-09 budget." "The 2007-08 budget provides up to one million dollars . . ."

And I hear the minister saying, you announced it but you had no plans to build it — simply not true. So when we look at the budget and there was announcements to put money for the children's hospital, very good; we need that money in there. The plans have been ongoing. So nobody should be confused that this was an announcement that came out of the minister's office on budget day. Nobody should be confused about that.

We committed as an NDP government in '05 to build this hospital, to build it as a tower or a pavilion, a hospital within a hospital. All those things were being considered as Saskatoon realigns its services. You can't just plunk something out there, even though some of the promises and the money that's been assigned has been sort of plunked out there. They're surprising some communities with long-term care facilities that they never even knew they were going to get.

But somehow or other you can't pick an ombudsman without having a year-long review. You can't look at HIV [human immunodeficiency virus], AIDS [acquired immune deficiency syndrome] without having a year-long review. But you can announce a hospital, a long-term care facility, without even any functional plan in place.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wonder how people are going to see the budget when they look at how it's been put together and how it's been presented. There's no doubt people want to have tax relief. There's no doubt they want to see a children's hospital. There's no doubt they want to have other services enhanced.

I don't know how you're going to see anything in health enhanced. From my perspective, looking at the budget, it's a 3.6 lift in health. Three point six is inflation — that's going to get us nowhere.

We don't even have contracts. The unions are all at the table,

except for SUN [Saskatchewan Union of Nurses]. Where's the money for those contracts? A lot of people work in the health system. The health system runs on people. Infrastructure does not pay wages. Infrastructure does not operate a facility. We've got all this infrastructure money, and good. We can build things. Can we operate them?

Maura Davies, the CEO [chief executive officer] from Saskatoon said, it's barely going to meet the inflationary costs of the district. I can't imagine any other district seeing anything different. But it's very quiet out there, so I'm wondering, you know, some of the things I hear in the House . . . there's intimidation going on. People don't want to say anything too much because they're afraid their funding will be cut. They're afraid of retribution. And you can hear the talk in the Chamber. There's a bullying element here that I think is out there in the community. People have told us they do not . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . A prime example, a prime example.

[15:15]

The Speaker: — Order. Every member has the right to be able to speak in the Chamber without interference. And I know that debate causes members to want to respond, but I will ask members to hold their comments until they are recognized and given the opportunity to speak. The member from Saskatoon Eastview.

Ms. Junor: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the comments that come across the floor today as well as every day that I hear, a lot of them have a really undercurrent of meanness. And so I don't disagree when people tell me in the community they're afraid to say something. They're afraid to speak out. That's out there. I don't think that's going to bode well for a government that sees themselves having a future in government for much longer. One term is all I can see people are going to put up with this. You don't get very far scaring people. It might work for awhile, but it's not going to work for long.

And before I have to sit down, Mr. Speaker, I do want to talk about the patient-first review which is going on right now. I look forward to hearing some of the things that are being found. It's a little bit disturbing. Some of the letters that I see from people that have concerns in health, I get copies of them, or I get them sent to me directly, and then I get the minister's response. Everybody's being fobbed off with the there's a patient review going on, so basically all your problems are put on hold while this review goes on.

And I understand the review will probably be put forward . . . The findings, the recommendations will be put forward in the late spring. We won't have an opportunity to critique it then in this House, which is unfortunate. But I think that there's enough people waiting for it obviously — seeing the letters that I see — that they're going to be watching to see what's going to be in it.

Most people's problems in the health system aren't solved by going down to one health district. The problems that they have in the health system are usually on a contact basis. Something has gone wrong when they have come in with either the service or the person.

It's not going to help to privatize housekeeping. That's a whole

other story. If we're going to talk about privatizing housekeeping, we're going to talk about superbugs. And superbugs — MRSA [multi resistant staphylococcus aureus], VRE [vancomycin resistant enterococci], C. [clostridium] difficile — those things are deadly. You take housekeeping out, privatize it, take it out of the purview of the health district or the government, where are the standards? You're going to see those superbugs coming out into the community, and they're starting to come now. I see some mention of infection control in this budget which I certainly want to pursue because this is a huge issue. These superbugs are out there, and if we even think about privatizing housekeeping, we're going to see an increase in that.

So I'm quite interested in seeing what the patient-first review has, as is everybody, and seeing if there is a magic bullet. Does Mr. Dagnone have the magic bullet? I doubt that. If there was a magic bullet, I'm sure that someone would have fired it by now.

We've had every review. We've had the system reviewed on an almost yearly basis. It isn't that easy to fix. And raising people's expectations, including some health districts who are somehow thinking that the patient-first review is going to save them money. They're going to be disappointed. If they're basing that on what they think is in their budget now and what the review will save them, that will keep them going, I doubt that they're going to be kept going for long. I'm sure we're going to be back in supplementary estimates, and we're going to be looking for putting more money in the health system, bailing out districts or regions with deficits like there's already been done this year from Saskatoon and Prince Albert and others.

So I don't think that the budget as presented is going to do the health system very much service. I think people are going to be disappointed. I think it's going to be very hard for the districts to continue at the level of service they're got now. And I, certainly given the fact that I talked about keeping the conversation honest and talked about integrity and transparency and accountability to the people of the province, I don't see it in this budget. I don't see it in the speeches. I don't see it in the remarks of the various ministers.

So, no I will not be voting for this budget. I don't trust that those things are there. I will not be voting for this budget, but I will be supporting the amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Wotherspoon: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really value the opportunity to rise in debate of the budget here today. It's one of the treasured opportunities we have as a member to rise in this Assembly as part of our democratic process, and I thank this Assembly for that opportunity.

I'm inspired by the words from the member from Regina eastview who just finished speaking, who highlighted the 30 — Saskatoon Eastview, sorry — who highlighted the many, many, many, many investments in health care facilities across rural Saskatchewan that the New Democrat government was committed to. It was great to see that.

I'd like to specifically thank the good citizens and my constituents in Regina Rosemont who have entrusted me to rise in this Assembly and to speak and to engage in debate. Very good, very good people who remain very close, and we keep good communication. I always welcome and encourage their participation in the process.

Just recently there's some specific changes in Regina Rosemont, Mr. Speaker, and not to belabour the point, but we're watching what's going to go on with Government House, Mr. Speaker. It's a treasure within our city and within our province and certainly within Regina Rosemont. It's concerning to see the number of staff who have been laid off and how that's going to affect service, and what that means for our constituency is something we'll continue to watch.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as well within Regina Rosemont, we have an incredible long-term care facility, Pioneer Village and Regina Village, that has recently been transferred to the health region, Mr. Speaker, and we see this likely as a positive move. And the reason it's positive is we need some support in that facility on the infrastructure side of things and some improvements, and certainly we know that government and the Health ministry has the capacity and the responsibility to support those kind of changes.

I would be remiss not to thank my constituency assistant, Donna From, who is an absolute pleasure to work with and who, I must say, Mr. Speaker, provides every citizen that walks into that office her relentless support and advocacy and guidance for their needs, and serves Regina Rosemont constituents incredibly well. She's a pleasure to work with on my end as well and I really appreciate her for the guidance she offers our constituents.

I'd like to thank my wife, Stephanie, as other members have mentioned their spouses. Our spouses certainly become part of our political lives. My wife, Stephanie's a school teacher here in Regina, Mr. Speaker, and who thoroughly enjoys her work. And beyond that she's certainly my confidant, my supporter, but also my critic, Mr. Speaker, which I think is important. I'd like to thank the broader group of friends and family who provide that important support to us as members.

Mr. Speaker, it was noteworthy last week after the budget was released, I went into the grocery store on 4th Avenue, Extra Foods, within Regina Rosemont. It's always a little bit of a hub of activity and a place to engage in some dialogue. It's almost as good as going next door to the Home Hardware on 4th Avenue, Mr. Speaker, where we have great political discourse as well.

And in the grocery store, Mr. Speaker, a group of constituents wanted to chat a little bit about the budget and I didn't say much; I just listened to their perspectives. And one individual kind of led the conversation a little bit more — so a contractor in the area, Mr. Speaker. And this contractor described himself as a non-partisan individual who's not aligned really with any particular party and was really interested in the best circumstances for our province.

But he related his own circumstances to that of the budget, Mr. Speaker, and he had criticism. He had scathing criticisms, Mr.

Speaker, of how the province, how the Sask Party was overestimating and being irresponsible with their revenue estimates, Mr. Speaker. He noted that in his business and his life that he had to be very responsible in setting those kind of estimates; that he didn't pin his budgets on revenues he might gain, or contracts he might gain or hope to gain or hope to obtain or whether he was optimistic about it. He had to base his finances off of safe assumptions. Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, he talked about he needed to make those responsible choices in purchasing equipment and in the outlay of debt to do so, and whether that's the cost of his housing arrangement or in his vehicles, and just to be responsible, not to be in too risky of a circumstance.

He related his personal circumstances to the provinces and was very concerned, Mr. Speaker, about the province's blindly optimistic outlook on the future and . . . I shouldn't say outlook on the future. He was concerned about the outlook into the actual budget and the assumptions that they used. He was concerned that it was more of a hope and a prayer. And this is a real concern of constituents of mine, Mr. Speaker.

And I guess that takes us to a very important fundamental question and concern we have as opposition, is that a budget is only as solid as its foundation. And this foundation, we're concerned, is weak. We're worried about the blind optimism of the members opposite who choose to completely not listen to economic indicators and to groups out there and to businesses out there and economists out there, such as Scotiabank or the Conference Board of Canada, who have put out GDP [gross domestic product] assumptions that, right now, are currently point six three for growth for the current year.

Of course we would love to see us completely outperform that, Mr. Speaker, but in responsible budget setting, that's not how you do it. You stick to the responsible and safe assumptions — something this government has completely failed to do. And I note that the climate in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, as many of our good friends in business and good heads as far as economists were in here for budget day, Mr. Speaker, I noted the mood as our trusted and able Finance critic dissected some of our base concern around the foundation and the overly optimistic assumptions. And it was kind of a quiet still, Mr. Speaker, that spilled over this room as these well-known business individuals, with good minds, agreed and were concerned with that. And we've heard from those same individuals since then, Mr. Speaker.

So the budget's foundation has been described as reckless, irresponsible, not based on trusted indicators, lacking sustainability . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . The Premier is asking about who we've heard from and would we like to table the names. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not going to table names of those trusted business individuals who have spoken out against this province's budget, because as the member from Saskatoon Eastview says, these individuals opposite, they hold vendettas. And we're not going to put those kind of names on the table.

And, Mr. Speaker, we're concerned with the debt circumstance in our province. We've worked so hard as a province, as a government, and as Saskatchewan people to improve our debt-to-GDP ratio out of an incredible mess that existed in the

late '80s and early '90s, Mr. Speaker. And that debt-to-GDP ratio has improved for well over a decade here now, Mr. Speaker. And it's a stark contrast and a grave concern to see that that trend is going to be reversing and that the debt side of that equation is going to grow significantly, Mr. Speaker. And Saskatchewan people, Saskatchewan people are concerned about this.

Within this budget as well, Mr. Speaker, we see runaway spending — a 25 per cent increase in over 2 years. Well, Mr. Speaker, I thought this government, the Saskatchewan Party was the government who promised to keep spending within 3 per cent per year — a campaign promise. Well, Mr. Speaker, we see runaway spending. We see poor economic assumptions by this government at a time of economic uncertainty, at a time where people of this province deserve something more, Mr. Speaker. They deserve responsible government. And it's certainly a stress for my constituents.

When we look at the inflation side of our circumstance — housing, natural gas — individuals, families, businesses being gouged right through the winter here, it's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. And we're going to continue to work to hold this government to account on the natural gas gouging that occurred this last winter.

I do have many other comments on the economy, Mr. Speaker, but I'm watching my time and I would like to maybe come back to them if I'm able to, following some comments on education.

This budget verified, Mr. Speaker, as we looked at the education aspects of it, again a very strong trend of legislate first and then consult later, Mr. Speaker. This is a concern. No consultation on a structure, a funding structure that's been in place prior to us becoming a province; one that supports the health of our treasured institution, that being our public education system, Mr. Speaker. And this has become a habit of this ministry — legislate first, consult later. An absolute fundamental change to how boards are funded and, Mr. Speaker, for the roles of school boards.

We start to ask questions and we wonder about how this might be challenged. We look at the constitutionally enshrined rights and access that Catholic school boards have to the tax base. We question things as far as the process that they had. Did they perform a third party constitutional analysis of the validity of the new property tax regime as it applies to separate school boards, Mr. Speaker? Catholic education in Saskatchewan has a proud, proud history. And this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is going to ensure that it has a bright, bright future as well.

When we look at the role of school boards, Mr. Speaker, there's so many questions out here now. There's shock within the school divisions and there's questions. What does this mean for autonomy? What does this mean for governance? It's a whole new landscape.

[15:30]

The minister committed to school boards that the scope of this report did not include their ability to levy for their local needs, Mr. Speaker. And that's so important because not every part of this province is the same. Whether we're up north in Northern

Lights School Division or whether we're down in the Southeast in Cornerstone, we have different needs, different communities. And it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that those boards, locally elected, that are accountable to the people, are able to provide for the service and education, equitable opportunities that are needed for all those students in every circumstance, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister chose not to let boards know that this was in the scope of his report. The member from Rosetown-Elrose chose to let boards believe that the ability to access the tax base wasn't being considered. And I guess that's a concern, Mr. Speaker, because here we have some members and a minister who have chosen to not be straight with valued partners in education, completely reversing a long-standing collaborative and respectful environment with education partners that quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, has served education incredibly well. It's a question of transparency, Mr. Speaker, of fairness.

So here we have so many questions as we go forward. Questions such as adequacy of this funding, what this means for the autonomy of school boards. And how are expenditures now going to be recognized, Mr. Speaker, and in their unique ways? And we know that costs to deliver education around this province differ. How is the minister going to be able to ensure that that's provided for, Mr. Speaker? How are we going to recognize the future plans of school divisions and school boards will be contained within the funding mechanism as we go forward?

I guess I ask the question, you know, will divisions that may have been constrained in the past by their ability to access the tax base, will they receive equity going forward? Is this an opportunity to really open up and make sure that we receive equity in education funding?

And it goes back to basic questions too, Mr. Speaker, about adequate funding for programs that are special and unique, Mr. Speaker. Because if boards are constrained and budgets are tight, we worry about funding for special education, Mr. Speaker. We worry about the additional support that's needed for local needs and for local plans, Mr. Speaker. How do we make sure that that inclusive educational experience for all students, regardless of where they live, Mr. Speaker, is provided for? How do we make sure that boards who are achieving in so many ways to progress and to be innovative in the ways they deliver education, how do we enable that through this funding mechanism, Mr. Speaker?

We're worried about this, Mr. Speaker, because if the minister himself doesn't recognize the need that the school board does, then they're not getting it, Mr. Speaker. And that's a huge departure. It's one, a question of autonomy. And many are concerned about this as an attack on the democratic delivery of education in our province, Mr. Speaker.

I'll share a couple comments here. And we're going to have so many more times to discuss this specific aspect of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, but I'll just quote from a media release from the Saskatchewan school boards, Mr. Speaker, on March 18, 2009. I quote:

“This is a profound change in the history of funding

education in Saskatchewan,” Challis said. “Boards have historically looked to the property tax base to ensure they were able to meet the needs of their students and local communities. There will no doubt be anxiety about how this will impact the autonomy of school boards.”

Mr. Speaker, another article on March 20, in the *Leader-Post*. I quote from this:

“It's an attack on democracy. It's an attack on their right to control and determine the nature of K-12 education system for their kids.” [Mr. Speaker.]

Well these are the concerns, Mr. Speaker, that we have on this side of the House. We're worried about them as we go forward.

We're worried about the lack of recognition for many other fronts here. Inequitable distribution of the property tax benefit, Mr. Speaker — that's been argued about. When property tax ratepayers get their assessments and go to pay their bills, they're going to realize many of them, particularly those in the urban centres, aren't seeing a decrease in their bills, Mr. Speaker. And we're worried about that equity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm being told that I need to wrap it up here right now, that my time is up. I have so many different pieces that I worry about. We're going to have many conversations going forward — both in this Assembly and in committee — to realize, I guess, the full impact of the ripping of this autonomy and this funding from school boards.

And we have particular questions around why child care spaces aren't open when they so need to be, Mr. Speaker, when we have projects announced last year that still aren't open now, when we see 1,000 new spaces that are apparently going to be opened up but no funding to actually see that they will be utilized, Mr. Speaker.

I could go on and on and on. This Sask Party opposite is failing the people of Saskatchewan in many ways. This opposition is going to stand up for them. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

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

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly a pleasure today to stand up before this budget debate. It's my, of course, my second one as a Member of the Legislative Assembly. And I'm truly happy to do this on behalf of the membership of the Prince Albert Carlton association and of course all the people that voted for me in the Prince Albert Carlton area.

And, Mr. Speaker, of course it goes without saying that, as other members have already mentioned over the last couple days, that we couldn't be here if it wasn't for the love and support of our families. And I want to thank my wife, Charlene, and my daughters, Alyssa and Mackenzie, for this opportunity. These are three strong ladies in my life that keep me on the straight and narrow. I come home on weekends and I have a list of things to do which include groceries and laundry. So I'm

very proud to be that kind of a husband and father, while they hold the home front down while I'm gone.

I also want to thank my constituency assistant Laura Parenteau, who had to learn very quickly the demands of a constituency assistant, and she's done a great job since February of last year when she was hired. And she keeps the office in shipshape form and maintaining a very busy schedule and helping all the people of Prince Albert and area that phone in looking for help from this government.

I also want to thank the staff who work in my office here in the Legislative Assembly for doing a great job, my chief of staff to my ministerial assistant. Right now, the other ministerial assistant has been seconded to Social Services to assist in that ministry. And those two ladies have done a great job. And of course the two EAs, executive assistants, that work in the office as well do a wonderful job in keeping me prepared and ready to go every day while I'm working here.

I also want to thank my colleagues on Treasury Board, the Minister of Finance in particular that's been a great mentor to me in teaching me the rules of the Treasury Board and putting budgets together, along with the other colleagues that work together, the five of us. Also the colleagues in cabinet and those in caucus who . . . Last year it was a very accelerated learning curve for all of us.

But this year we came together, worked on this budget — a very historic budget. It's a very strong budget, Mr. Speaker. It's historic because it's designed to keep our Saskatchewan economy strong and steady at a time of great economic uncertainty around the world. And we are leading right now. We're very optimistic that we'll maintain that kind of growth and that momentum, but we're very cautious as well, Mr. Speaker.

We kept our promises. We'll keep those other promises that still have to be done. My colleagues have stated, over 100 promises kept so far. We have a few other ones that are going to be taken care of in the next two budgets I'm sure, with no problem at all. But the biggest ones are the education portion of property tax, enhancements to revenue sharing which was critical to my city, increasing the number of police officers — and we're going to maintain our promise of 120. I'll speak more to that later when I talk about the ministry I'm responsible for. We're going to build a children's hospital, and of course providing a lift to CBO funding levels.

In Prince Albert alone, Mr. Speaker, prior to the actual budget, we had a booster shot. And I want to talk about the Minister of Health and his officials. They did a great job. They provided almost \$6 million to the Parkland Regional Health Authority, which provides for much-needed service delivery pressure money, plus functional planning dollars to design moving forward. Because this government, as I stated in my campaign, wants to recognize that hospital as a true regional hospital. Absolutely. It services over 160,000 people of the North and around the Prince Albert area.

And with this budget as well, the Minister of Health and our government is putting an additional lift of \$27.8 million to fund that regional health authority. Long overdue, I might add, to

support this CEO and her fine staff that work there, and to tackle demands and the pressures put on them as we move forward.

And I really believe now I can go back to my constituents and say that I made a promise in the campaign and we've kept it. Because we recognize that and it's funded as a truly regional health authority and hospital . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . P.A. is finally getting some recognize. Yes, sir, we are.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — I'm also very happy to thank the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure because they are going to repair a road that was turned to gravel at the Murray Point access, Highway 953, in this budget. The functional planning dollars are for that. Many of my constituents thank the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure for that because they spend their summers travelling back and forth to Prince Albert from the lake, and they've noticed over the last two years that the highway's deteriorated. The former government made it to gravel, and that's wrecked their vehicles: stone chips, holes in floorboards of their trucks, damage to their trailers. So I'm very happy to be a part of this government that's going to make changes in that effect.

Of course this government announced, along with the Prime Minister of Canada, a very historic announcement to accelerate the twinning of Highway No. 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. And we've all known, those of us who've travelled that road many times, that it's very dangerous, has been a very dangerous stretch of highway, for reasons that vary from weather conditions to those people who shouldn't be on the road after taking part in too much activity.

And you know what, there's been some tragedy. I think every one of us has known someone or a family member of someone who's passed away on that road. And it's good to see that the two governments, two levels of governments, are moving forward with a plan. Again the Minister of Highways and Infrastructure has a rolling capital plan, but the federal government is going to help along to accelerate that from an eight-year project to four, now with our input as well. So we're very happy about that.

The revenue sharing that we're taking part in this year is historic in itself as well, because now the mayors recognize this type of PST is tied to the provincial economy in such a way that they recognize that when we're doing well, they'll do well. And you know what, the mayor of Prince Albert . . . Actually it was in the Prince Albert *Herald* the day after the budget, and I want to quote. It says, "The government fulfilled its promise from last year and for that I commend them." He also goes on to say that the government introduced a formula endorsed by municipalities themselves.

SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] wanted that kind of formula, Mr. Speaker. They wanted it tied to PST, so it worked out very well. They're very happy with that. And moving forward, it's an extra \$1.5 million this year for my city and next year it's even more. And he's very thankful for that, and I'm happy to be a part of a government doing that.

Prince Albert also sees the fact that we get four new municipal police officers out of this budget, Mr. Speaker, as part of the 30 for the year. Saskatoon will get four. Regina gets four. Yorkton will get two municipal police officers, RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officers, and then the remainder of the province will be covered by RCMP support. And that's critical because simply the northern part of our province — and the member from Cumberland's gone, but Athabasca's here — and we talked about, with the policing executive people, the need for a northern drug strategy, because the North needs that. So what I want to do, Mr. Speaker, is . . . The commitment now is that we have an integrated drug strategy we're working on with the members of the Prince Albert Police Service and the RCMP, who'll be able to have officers in detachments to tackle the northern drug problem. So we're looking at that, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of that statement today in our budget.

Seven new SCAN [safer communities and neighbourhoods] officers will take us to the point where we can actually look at not just working in Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and other bigger communities, but now we can have officers go to the North and do surveillance as well which will alleviate the police officers who are tied to surveillance for the gang and drug activity.

I also want to talk about, we are providing \$1.6 million to the 30 officers, and it's part of our 120 officer commitment. So we're doing very well there.

The RCMP on budget day issued a news release commending the government on its provincial budget. They stated, and I quote, "RCMP Saskatchewan is pleased with the relationship and planning process that has taken place in preparation for today's budget."

I want to go back to 1999 and 2003, inasmuch as that one promise that was made was for 200 more officers in 1999. Well when we got to 2003, they made the same promise again to fulfill the 200 officers. And at the time, of course, I was a member of the Prince Albert Police Service and a proud member of the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers and the board of directors. I knew, as do my colleagues on this side of the House that were former police officers that are part of the Sask Fed, that they fell woefully short of the 200 officers, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And based on some numbers that I had present when I was in the Sask Fed, 80 is roughly the number that they were short. So we made a promise of 120 over four years. We'll get there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's surely a promise we will keep, guaranteed.

Within the ministry as well I'd already announced \$87 million for a new remand centre in Saskatoon, which will help to alleviate our overcrowding pressures there — \$9.4 million in safety and security upgrades for our institutions. And that came from talking to the union leadership from Corrections, and sad to say that they had brought those concerns up for many years to the previous minister of the NDP, and for whatever reason their concerns fell on deaf ears. And I equate this to a phrase that we used in policing all the time. You know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker, failing to plan was planning to fail.

And that was too bad that they didn't recognize that, but this

government in this budget is making a historic injection of cash for brand new bed spaces. Since 1980s no brand new bed spaces were ever put in place. They replaced the unit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, absolutely, and I commend them for that. The 1913 unit was replaced.

[15:45]

So moving on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know my time is tight, so I want to just finish off by saying that the children's hospital is very important.

I want to give a shout out to the people who worked in the MRI [magnetic resonance imaging] department at City Hospital where my daughter Mackenzie, the youngest daughter, had to go there for a checkup on her eye. She had some issues coming forth, but the staff there were phenomenal. The technicians treated her like she was a young adult, as she is, a young woman, and made her feel very comfortable. So I want to thank them for that. And it made my wife and I feel very comfortable as well, so that was good news. And we got good news; she's going to be fine. So it's great to have that moving forward.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Hickie: — Thank you. But the children's hospital that this government is going to fund is going to help other parents who have much more serious concerns than I and my wife had. So I look forward to having that built and cutting the ribbon there with my colleagues.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that I should get, my time should be wrapped up here. In all the things we are doing in this budget, we will still have a \$425 million surplus — in economic times unheard of in my generation and most of the generations in this room. And I think that moving forward, the people of Saskatchewan will still lead, this government will lead the way, and we're very optimistic but cautious, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I am proud to say that I will support this budget, and I will not support the amendment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

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

Mr. Furber: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off my engagement in this budget dialogue by thanking my new wife, Michelle.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Furber: — She decided to marry me even after she knew what I did for a living and the stress that it would cause her, and I'm thankful for the support that I get at home with her.

I'd also like to thank my constituency assistants in Prince Albert. They work hard to deliver a great service to the people of Prince Albert, and I'd like to thank them for their attempt to make me look good on a day-to-day basis. Any failure to make me look good is my own; it's not theirs. So I'd like to thank them for their commitment to the people of Prince Albert.

I'd like to thank the folks that work in the caucus office during

the session. It's long hours; it's tough work. But they do it very diligently and well. So I'd like to thank them as well, Mr. Speaker.

Now the government has said many times that they want to continue the economic momentum in Saskatchewan. I'd like to talk a little bit about the continue part of continue momentum. That implies that indeed there was momentum to begin with, and they seem to fail to acknowledge that on a daily basis in this Chamber. And I've found it frustrating to listen to, and so have many of my colleagues and many of the people of Prince Albert and Saskatchewan who know the truth about the economy in this province.

We've been a have province since 2004. We've seen our population increasing since 2005. The growth . . . GDP in this province has started years ago. The unemployment rate has been decreasing for years. Paul Martin, himself an esteemed entrepreneur in this province, has talked about the population increasing in this province.

Now let's talk about how we got here. We changed the taxes for the manufacturing sector in this province nearly 10 years ago. Royalties for oil and gas were changed seven or eight years ago, Mr. Speaker, and we're thankful that the industry responded and made huge investments in our province in this sector. Additionally we reduced taxes for small business, increased the threshold for the small-business income tax, moved to eliminate the corporate capital tax, and in '99 provided the greatest decrease in personal income tax in the province's history. So that's why the economy in Saskatchewan is as strong as it is — not because of anything that they've done to this point, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about, if I can, some of the economic policies that they've brought forward to help grow this economy. And they could provide me with a list right now if they'd choose, Mr. Speaker. And I guess the paused silence there leads me to believe that they know full well that they haven't provided anything, except two minor things. Well one of them is a big thing and they certainly deserve credit for that. They provided a stimulus package which I'll talk about a little bit later here. And they provided some education portion of property tax relief that's been called for for some time.

Now I want to talk a little bit, if I can, about Enterprise Saskatchewan. In a speech to the North Saskatoon Business Association, the then member from Swift Current said that each team upon election, "Each team will have one month to prepare its first inventory of the barriers to growth holding that sector back from reaching its full potential . . ."

Well we've had one month and 16 to follow. And what have we got for recommendations out of Enterprise Saskatchewan? Nothing. They've made three recommendations, Mr. Speaker, that have all been denied by that government. It's a failure of the administration. It's a failure of the minister responsible.

Now we've had a forestry crisis in this province for over two years. And what have they done about it, Mr. Speaker? They admitted two years ago that it was a crisis. In his speech, again the now Premier said that: "We won't need to appoint a forestry task force as . . . [Calvert] did in the wake of the recent

Weyerhaeuser announcement — one will already exist."

Now he says that they won't need to appoint a task force to look after the forestry industry in the province of Saskatchewan because one will exist. Well if it exists, what's it done? What are the recommendations for the forestry sector in this province coming out of Enterprise Saskatchewan? They've had 17 months. They've recognized it's in crisis for two years. They've done nothing. Again, a failure by the minister responsible and the administration as a whole.

Now right after he said that they won't need a task force, what does he do? He appoints a task force. And the member from Batoche is the head of this task force. They spend government money running around the province, say that they're going to release a report based on their findings, and where's the report? It's two years later. There's no report; they haven't produced one. They've said that they produced one, and I'd like to see the findings of that report tabled in this legislature. If they've produced a report, it should be easy to table it today.

Now in addition to the forestry crisis, we've been in a global economic crisis that affects Saskatchewan greatly in the last few months. And what have we got for recommendations out of Enterprise Saskatchewan to respond to the global economic crisis? Dead silence again. There's nothing coming out of Enterprise Saskatchewan to respond to the global economic crisis.

Now it's interesting. We've had job layoffs, nuclear power proposals. Enterprise Saskatchewan has provided none of the information to the people of Saskatchewan on any of these issues.

Now I'd like to read — speaking of the nuclear portion — I'd like to read another quote from the now Premier of the province of Saskatchewan about the nuclear industry in Saskatchewan. And I quote:

The dithering will come to an end. And moreover, I signal today to our universities, that it is time for Saskatchewan to act morally and ethically on the issue of uranium and the half-life of fuel rods.

. . . We should be and we can be a world leader in the research into further refinement and storage options.

So where is the dialogue on storage options as the Premier promised there would be, back in his speech to the North Saskatoon Business Association? Where is it? He says that he's going to signal to the universities that we should act morally; we have a moral responsibility and an ethical responsibility to store fuel rods in this province. And where is the dialogue? There's no dialogue.

It's an embarrassment to that administration that they can't provide a proper dialogue on the uranium industry in Saskatchewan and its growth, and the potential for storage in this province, which they're going to slam the people of Saskatchewan with without warning. Now I don't understand how they can go down that road. They've hidden their agenda so far, and I wonder how long it's going to stay hidden.

Now they've had no consultation on the nuclear file to date. Communities have taken it upon themselves to hold their own; they've got 400 people showing up in a community of 500 to host a nuclear event. They want a discussion, not provided by the ministry of Enterprise Saskatchewan.

Now I want to talk for a little while about a few more reasons why this budget scares the people of Saskatchewan. A 12.4 per cent spending increase. Now that's not on top of a contraction from last year; that's on top of over 10 per cent last year. How is it possible that a conservative government comes in with nearly 25 per cent over two years as an increase to the provincial budget? On top of that, they've had a campaign promise for a 3 per cent growth. So are we going to be cutting the growth of government in this province over the next two years of their administration to respond to their own promise?

Now the Premier took out billboards in Saskatoon to brag about a 42 per cent reduction in debt in this province. Now the members are clapping, and good for them. But I'm hopeful that there'll be some honesty with those billboards in the future. Is the Premier's picture going to be on the same billboards in the same places in this province signalling the 36.25 per cent increase under his administration in this province over the years to come? That's a good question. And are they going to do it? I doubt it, Mr. Speaker.

Additionally, total debt in this province has increased by \$1 billion this year. How is it possible, when you've got the greatest revenue in the government's history in this province and you increase the debt by nearly \$1 billion the same year? Only a conservative government in Saskatchewan could manage that one.

Now I've got a question for the Enterprise Saskatchewan minister about the budget. Was Enterprise Saskatchewan consulted about it at all? Did they provide any input? They're supposed to be providing input on all things to do with the economy in Saskatchewan. And were they consulted on this piece? It seems not. There hasn't been a release of any kind that suggests that they have been.

In their defence, the province has provided what they call a \$500 million booster shot to the province for economic stimulus. Now they provided it before March 31 so that they could avoid a deficit in the same year that there's already going to be \$1 billion debt added to the province. In the same year that they've got record revenues in this province, they're doing it — they're providing a \$500 million advance payment to avoid a deficit with the greatest revenue in government's history.

Now I want to talk about . . . Basically there's four facets to this booster shot: municipal funding, the ed sector, highways and infrastructure, and for care homes. Now the municipal funding piece. They call it a booster shot, but this province has provided no guarantees to the people of this province that this money will be used in a timely fashion on new projects in order to boost the economy. This money could be sat on for years by municipalities, who I'm sure were glad to get it but there's no guarantee that they're going to use it. So it's not part of an economic stimulus by any definition.

The ed sector funding, this was advanced without allowing for appropriate planning by administration. It was sprung, and I'm sure they are glad to get it. But again, speaks to economic stimulus? How can you provide economic stimulus when you're surprised by a huge portion of dollars like that, some of which were reannouncements?

In terms of the highways and infrastructure piece, I'm sure the large budget is welcome by a number of folks for reasons of economic and safety reasons. But in estimates, the minister responsible bragged about how Alberta contractors would likely get the bulk of this work, taking both wages and profits back to the province of Alberta. Well I'm glad our Saskatchewan government's economic stimulus package is there to provide stimulus for the province of Alberta. What kind of sense does that make, Mr. Speaker?

Now I want to talk about what Enterprise Saskatchewan's recommendations might be on some recent job layoffs: Doepker Industries, 50 to 60 employees; Babcock & Wilcox, 43; Startec, 266; Cameco, 35; Agrium, 300; Shore Gold, 89; Prairie Diagnostic, 13; Mosaic potash, 1,000; Potash Corporation, 940; Evraz, 100; Evraz again, 75; Advanced Engineering, 96. That's 3,017 jobs. What's the recommendation out of Enterprise Saskatchewan on how to deal with these job losses? What have they provided for answers for these folks from this government? Again, dead silence — 17 months on a promise of one month return, and nothing out of Enterprise Saskatchewan.

Now again, I will not support this budget. I'll be supporting the amendment for a number of reasons. One, it adds \$1 billion of debt at a time of record revenues for the province. The debt-to-GDP ratio . . . You know, they were elected to grow the economy, but what they're going to do, as they promise in their own document, to grow the debt faster than they're going to grow the economy until 2013. How is that possible in the province with the way it was on a roll? And you know, all this economy could stand was 12 months of these folks — that's it — and then it started to contract.

Now they've provided no pre-K [pre-kindergarten] seats. First Nations and Métis leaders have weighed in. They're totally excluded in this budget. It's unfortunate. Property tax, the minister can't even provide a guarantee that every single property owner in Saskatchewan is going to get a reduction. I don't see how that provides anything for their campaign promise.

Additionally, they're assuming a growth that's three times that of industry experts. There's no way that anybody reasonable could support this budget based on those facts, Mr. Speaker. I'll be supporting the amendment and not the budget. Thank you.

[16:00]

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand here today to respond to this budget on behalf of my constituents, for the communities, the families, and the individuals I have the

privilege to represent, and who have gained very little or nothing from this budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not support this budget. I cannot support this budget and for these reasons.

Highways and roads in my constituency are a huge concern. We have brought in petitions from my communities hoping, hoping this government with its \$10.2 billion budget would address some of the northern issues. And unfortunately even with petitions, it didn't work so far, but we'll continue.

We look at Highway 135 from Pelican; Highway 123, Cumberland House, when we look at these roads and the conditions of them, petitions again for Highway 123. If that's the only way to get the attention, then I guess that's what we have to do. With such a large budget, the hope, the hope that people had from this budget, the opportunity that was there for all Saskatchewan residents. I look at the slow walking, the road at Wollaston Lake. I look at the road there to Wollaston — slow. Let's move. Sandy Bay has issues on roads; Hall Lake, Stanley Mission, Sandy Bay as well for roads. These are just a few of the roads that need to be addressed.

I go back home and, you know, you hear some of the issues for Métis and First Nations. And it's unfortunate with the amount of money that was in this budget that some of the issues for First Nations and Métis couldn't have been addressed. To the Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations, core funding for the MNS [Métis Nation of Saskatchewan] with this budget should have easily been attainable. The duty to consult, the process to ensure that that process happens, kind of hard when the process isn't being followed. Or maybe what's being accomplished by the process isn't being heard by the government or the minister.

I look at DTI [Dumont Technical Institute] and there was a shortfall. It could have been addressed in this large budget but it wasn't, Mr. Deputy Speaker. People came here hoping to hear some good news. The excitement was out there. Lots of money. Huge spending. People were truly . . . an opportunity to address some of the concerns.

They left not so happy; not so excited like some are. For some communities and some individuals, yes. Some people, different industries, wonderful — benefitted. I give you that. But not all Saskatchewan residents who took part in this amount of money and surplus that was there got the benefits.

And you can talk about the tax cuts. When you have communities that have unemployment rate at 80 per cent, what are tax cuts going to do for them with their costs rising? When you have First Nations housing, the crowding, and communities in my constituency, Métis, that are struggling. They're so overcrowded. We thought there was an opportunity. So did they. Excitement. Didn't happen. Let down.

You will have to answer to that. You had an opportunity. You made decisions and choices. You will deal with that.

We have an organization like Clarence Campeau Development Fund. Same status quo funding, 2 million. We're looking for opportunities for Métis entrepreneurs — status quo. Sad.

The Minister of First Nations and Métis Relations, in this

House, said she had 80 meetings. And as far as I'm sure, nothing to show for it. Because people left here. First Nations and Métis truly are saying what's on their mind now. I hope they do bring their message forward. We need to hear their message. We need to hear their hopes. We need to make sure that you hear what their community needs were. They don't feel like they were heard. And some people may think that's okay. I think it's a shame.

We look at long-term care facilities. Announcements, wonderful for those communities. But for my communities — nothing. For the North — nothing. Well you know, to the Minister of Health, we don't have to sit back. Community members will do what they need to do. They will fight back. They will do petitions, a letter-writing campaign. They will do public awareness. If they feel they have to do that to have our elders taken care of, then that's what they have to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we want a long-term care centre for our elders. In many of our communities in the North we need them. I speak of one. It was definitely concerning that some of our biggest communities in the North didn't even get an announcement. But we'll work on that as a community, and we'll bring our concerns to this legislature.

Addictions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are a huge problem. But I want to compliment the staff that are out there. The staff in that field are doing an excellent job. They're trying their best, but they need more resources, more facilities. There are social problems out there, Mr. Speaker, many of them. But I think with this amount of money that was out there, a lot of those could have been addressed and unfortunately were not. And that again — hope for some people, hope for some people was not in this budget.

We talk about northern schools, and I commend Churchill High School for its staff, its students, the parents, the organizations that did all they could to make sure that announcement came. I commend them. What a job. Now let's build it.

Some of our communities, we announced cell coverage for 98 per cent of the province — wonderful. I thought it was wonderful, and I commented about how I thought it was a good thing to do. But unfortunately I found out it was only for populated areas, so some of my communities like Southend who were trying to receive that have not got that. Grandmother's Bay. There's other communities need it didn't get it, unfortunately.

I'm concerned about Northern Affairs losing the department designation. It used to have an opportunity to argue for northern people and deal with some of the concerns. It no longer has that opportunity, I feel. When we have a minister who's busy dealing with First Nations and Métis over 80 meetings, so the North obviously isn't getting addressed like it should be from her department.

I look at forestry. Forestry workers need support. They need to have a government who will go out and talk with them, ask them what they need, what can we do as a government. With all our money, what can we do for you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people would have probably said, here are some ideas; here's the communities that are impacted. But no, no, we won't do

that.

I'm also here to speak on behalf of commercial fishers . . .

The Deputy Speaker: — Order. There's a little more yelling from the floor. I'd like the members to respect the member that has the floor. Everybody will have a chance to speak to the budget. I recognize the member from Cumberland.

Mr. Vermette: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I'm also here to speak on behalf of commercial fishers and trappers. I've got phone calls from their concerns of not being addressed. Lost transportation subsidies that government cut the previous year, I thought would be reinstated. And maybe we could go and talk to them, how could this money assist you better? What could we do to help you better instead of cutting the money and not putting it back? But that didn't happen. Why that didn't happen. Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that did not happen.

Low fur prices right now are affecting our trappers. It's tough. It's tough out there. I was at the Northern Trappers Association convention. They are struggling. They wanted some assistance. With the amount of money and spending that was this budget, that could have been addressed. The Minister of Northern Affairs could have addressed it. It didn't get addressed, and that's sad.

There are some loans out there for northern fishermen and trappers, and unfortunately from what I'm hearing, there's not many of them getting approved or getting access. So how do we address that? The minister, with this money, could have addressed that. It's tight out there. We need to work as best we can as a province to help everyone, to make sure everyone's concerns.

That is such a crucial thing. And we could sit here and call blame, we could play the game, but all I have to say is this: at the end of the day, it is the people, the children, and our community members that will suffer. And I think that is such an important thing to share amongst ourselves.

There are so many opportunities in my community that I have heard from people. With the amount of spending, there was so much excitement. There was so much excitement and hope. People came with expectations. They came with expectations and unfortunately they left — they left — feeling like they were not heard; they were left out. Why is that? All these meetings that went on with First Nations and Métis minister, they felt like they were left out, forgotten. Why is that?

We'll see what's going to happen with the school divisions and funding. We'll see what's going to happen with school divisions and their funding. Maybe once they look at their budget it will be all right. Maybe they're going to find out their autonomy has been taken away . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, thank you. I look at it, that, and that is concern to me. We'll see what they say. We have to look at the numbers. They're going to talk, and I'm sure they're going to express themselves to you and to the government and to the Minister of Education.

I want to go back to just reflecting on the opportunities that the government had to so many community members out there.

You had an opportunity to the Métis, the First Nations, the northern, and the rest of Saskatchewan — all of us. You had such an opportunity with such money. And you did, you failed them. You failed them.

But it's fine. It's fine. I've heard a lot of, oh you didn't do anything. You guys didn't do anything. The government previously didn't do anything. That's fine. I can accept that. That's the way it is; I understand that. But at the end of the day, so many people feel let down by that government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It's unfortunate.

But, you know, I'm happy. I have staff that work for me and work with me in my constituency. And community members that are good people, are going to work hard and fight. And if we have to fight, we'll fight. We'll do what we have . . . It's not something that's new to us. We'll continue. And we'll do what we need to do to bring the concerns to all the departments and the ministers. And you can make your decisions again, and I hope you make the right decisions.

Mr. Vermette: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, therefore I will not be supporting this budget and I will be voting for the amended budget. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

[16:15]

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Batoche.

Mr. Kirsch: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I begin, I would like to once again thank the ladies that keep me on even keel: my wife, partner, and friend, Valerie, and also my CA [constituency assistant], friend, and confidante, Mary Anne. Thank you both to these ladies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this year's budget. This budget marks the new beginning for the province of Saskatchewan. Last year's budget laid down the foundation that became the cornerstone to our future. Last year the world was in full bloom; there was no stopping us. Oil was over \$140 a barrel. The world was surging ahead as if there was no tomorrow.

Today the world is a much different place. This budget is under much different circumstances. The world is now under a global recession; companies, corporations, banks, and even countries are staggering under this recession. Even the United States of America, the economic giant of the world, is floundering under this perfect storm. Banks and insurance companies have collapsed. This winter oil was down to thirty-some dollars a barrel. Chrysler and General Motors teeter on the brink of the abyss.

In past years, this would have been thought to be impossible, a joke, inconceivable. Today this and all the surrounding consequences are a real and scary possibility.

Yet in this perfect financial storm, this global disaster, there's a place of tranquility — a place that is calm, a place that shows financial growth, a place that did not use red ink in its budget, a

place that so far is weathering the world's woes very well. This place is of course our very own Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Kirsch: — You might ask, why has Saskatchewan been able to avoid this perfect storm? How are we able to protect ourselves from the plight of the world? The answer is because of the strength of our resources and the very prudent management of our resource revenues by the new Saskatchewan Party government.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Kirsch: — With last year's budget we laid the foundation, which enabled us to withstand the brunt of such a global economic disaster. We have planned wisely and now we cautiously move into our second budget by building on that foundation. We have set up this province for a future of growth and stability — the likes of which have never been seen. This budget touches the life of everyone in Saskatchewan with a positive note.

The real test of any budget is not the condemnation of the opposition members and their tired, old, negative gloom-and-doom stance. It is the opinion of people of this province that really counts.

I would like to share with you, Mr. Speaker, and members of this House, some of the comments of the people of this province. But in order to save time, I'll omit these comments. And as you have heard from my colleagues, these comments have all been very positive.

Governments in the past haven't been known for keeping their promises, only for making them. The new Saskatchewan Party government, in only 16 months of governing, has already kept over 100 promises made during the election. The mantra of the Saskatchewan Party government is a promise made, a promise kept.

What a refreshing change from the previous government that gives people much-needed confidence in their government and their province. The NDP government operates under the mantra that they are the social conscience of the people of this province. This façade has been wiped away by the Saskatchewan Party. You don't have to be a socialist to have a social conscience. I repeat, you don't have to be a socialist to have a social conscience.

Once again, we have done more for the people of this province in 16 months than the NDP have done for the people in 16 years. We have not only fulfilled our promises, we fulfilled the promises that the previous government made and remade and never kept. For example, the Humboldt hospital, the Saskatchewan first children's hospital, the bridge at St. Louis, and property tax relief, just to name a few.

I would now like to read a quote from a book called *Stampede!: The Rise of the West and Canada's New Power Elite* by Gordon Pitts. He is talking about the pre-'07 election in Saskatchewan and the view other people have about our province. And I quote:

On the other side of the border, in poor dysfunctional, socialistic Saskatchewan, the roads are unpaved and the potholes surely reflect an economy that has been held back by state-controlled regulations, onerous taxes, and all kinds of bad, leftist policy.

This is what we have to contend with in Saskatchewan, not just potholes and onerous taxes, but the attitude of the people that have been held back by this leftist government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, no longer. A new day is dawning. The new budget sets the course for Saskatchewan. Our future is bright. When you realistically look at us being the only balanced budget in all of Canada, Mr. Speaker, in all of Canada, that really sets us apart. In fact this might be the only balanced budget in North America.

Prudent management of our resources and our revenue has brought us here in just 16 short months, a phenomenal feat for any government. The people of Saskatchewan are very proud of the choices they made to change the government on November 7, 2007. There is renewed vigour and excitement that can't be held back and we are only just beginning.

This budget not only is the best budget this province of Saskatchewan has ever had, it addressed many problems of my constituency in Batoche. In our constituency of Batoche this budget gives us not only all the rewards that all the residents of Saskatchewan will receive, it also gives us Highway 368 and our bridge at St. Louis. These two items have been huge deterrents to forward-thinking people that drive industry and commerce in this province, and also to the ordinary people who drive that highway and have to cross that bridge.

With my farming and ranching background, it behooves me to mention the monumental steps the Saskatchewan Party government has made to alleviate the plight of our agricultural producers. The NDP policy was to download taxation on rural people and municipalities of this province. This year our government increased the budget of the Department of Agriculture by \$177.5 million, for a grand total of 483.4 million. That is an increase of 58 per cent. The majority of that increase goes into our risk management programs.

This government is keeping our promise to fully fund our share of the federal-provincial government programs like AgriStability and AgriInvest which provide certainty and security for our producers.

The improvements to the 2009 crop insurance program will cost the provincial government an additional 20 million. These improvements are a result of last year's crop insurance review, which included input from over 1,000 producers. The provincial government's contribution to crop insurance program in 2009 is the largest ever made by a Saskatchewan government.

The overall amount of tax paid by property owners to fund education were reduced by 103 million this first year. A family of four earning 50,000 will realize over \$2,000 in tax savings this year. Between the income tax cuts announced last fall and other family benefits, coupled with today's property tax relief, overall we are putting more than 700 million back into the Saskatchewan economy this year through tax reductions, which

will help keep our economy strong. Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a joy to see all of these exciting dreams of our forefathers now becoming a reality.

The days of the wee province are now a thing of the past. The have-not status has gone by the wayside. The new day they have dreamt about is here. With prudent stewardship, we will all see a new horizon for our province. At this point in Saskatchewan's history, I know that I am privileged to stand in this House and represent the people of Batoche constituency. I am deeply indebted to these same people for that privilege, and I wish to humbly thank them for this honour. It is on their behalf that I enthusiastically endorse this historic budget.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — I recognize the member from Meadow Lake.

Mr. Harrison: — Well thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to rise today to enter into the debate on this budget. It's very much a privilege to rise in this House representing the great people of the constituency of Meadow Lake where I've had the pleasure to represent for the past year and a half in this House, and previously in another House — really an incredible honour, Mr. Speaker.

It's customary I know at the budget speech to acknowledge those that serve you, that help you, that you work with on a daily basis, and I would like to firstly acknowledge the work of my constituency assistant, Sharlene Beaulieu, who has been a great friend, great supporter, and an incredibly talented CA over the course of the past year and a half, who takes care of the details that are so important to MLAs and so important to constituents. So I would very much like to acknowledge her contribution to not just our office, but to the people of Meadow Lake.

Also I'd like to acknowledge the support, the friendship, the companionship of my wife Alaina who — we've been now married for about three and a half years and have been together for over 10 now — recently she gave birth to our first child . . .

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Harrison: — . . . only about eight weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, MacGregor, and young Mac I'm sure is actually . . . tell a story, Mr. Speaker. Alaina actually went into labour during a town hall meeting that I was conducting in Goodsoil. And she told me, you know, I'm going into labour. And I said well, you know, we should really be getting then to the hospital. And she said, no, you are holding this town hall meeting and you're going to finish it. So we finished the town hall meeting and I said, I'm not sure if it's a good thing or not that Mac decided he wanted out listening to his Dad give a speech. So we'll see how that develops in the future, Mr. Speaker.

I'd also like to acknowledge my father who's helping out with Alaina and Mac right now. And I'm sure grandpa always has some good pointers and advice and he'll have a good critique at the end of this talk.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm not an overly partisan member.

I, you know, look at things with a very objective eye, and I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I looked at this budget and looked at it very carefully, examined it, and I've got to tell you this is the best budget that has ever been delivered on the floor of this legislature in the 100-plus year history of this province.

And I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker. Firstly our new budget is a balanced budget. And we may be the only province that tables a balanced budget this year, and if for no other reason, Mr. Speaker, that really is a remarkable accomplishment.

You look around — not just this country — you look at the federal government running a significant budget deficit. You look at provincial governments, an example being Ontario bringing a budget in tomorrow rumoured to be an \$18 billion deficit over two years. You look at the United States federal government running a budget deficit of \$1.75 trillion. You look at US states running cumulative budget deficits in the tens of billions of dollars. And although we've maintained a balanced budget, we were able to deliver on some major commitments to the people of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Property taxpayers have funded a disproportionately high share of education costs in our province for far too long. That's why during the 2007 campaign the Premier promised a long-term solution to this problem, and this budget's kept that promise. Under the new system, the province will cut and cap education property tax rates for each of the three major property classes — being residential, agriculture, and commercial. The overall amounts of tax paid by property owners to fund education will be reduced by \$103 million or 14 per cent this year compared to last. This represents the largest education property tax cut in a single year in the history of our province. The provincial government will increase its share of funding to school divisions by just over \$240 million this year. As a result, the province will fund about 63 per cent of the operating costs for pre-kindergarten to grade 12 education, up from last year's provincial funding of 51 per cent.

The education property tax will be reduced by a further \$53 million next year with the province assuming an offsetting share of the funding. At that point the provincial government will be funding about 66 per cent, two-thirds of the cost of education. The vast majority of Saskatchewan property owners will pay less education tax under this new system. This budget's announcement fulfills the Premier's commitment to achieve a fair balance for education funding, to properly fund education, and to significantly reduce the education portion of the property tax.

[16:30]

And our government will continue to improve the competitiveness of Saskatchewan as a place to do business. This budget will introduce a progressive three-rate structure to determine the education property tax on commercial property so small businesses will pay at a lower mill rate. Mill rates will be applied consistently across the province to promote equity for all businesses while meeting the government's tax relief commitment.

And I would also, Mr. Speaker, very much like to congratulate my very likable friend from Rosetown-Elrose for the great work

that he did on this initiative. And I have to add, Mr. Speaker, he really is a likable member. I think you would find unanimity on this side of the House anyway, and I think probably from some members of the press gallery as well who might agree with the likability of that member. So I think that's quite a positive thing.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Harrison: — During the 2007 campaign, the Premier made another important commitment to Saskatchewan municipalities. He said our government would introduce a new revenue-sharing deal with municipalities tied to the province's own-source revenues.

In this budget, we've kept that promise as well. We've introduced a new municipal operating grant program. This program will provide funding support equal to 90 per cent of one percentage point of the PST. This is the first step in our plan to provide municipal operating grants based on one full point of the PST. We'll bump it up to a full percentage point next year, thereby providing a reliable and predictable source of revenue to Saskatchewan communities.

In this budget, municipalities will receive nearly \$170 million to continue fixing sewer systems, upgrading streets, improving parks, and enhancing public buildings. And that's on top of the 100 million in one-time municipal infrastructure funding the Premier announced in February. This is what municipal leaders wanted — to tap into a predictable revenue source — and this government has delivered.

Last year we announced \$1 billion in our ready-for-growth plan to rebuild schools, improve hospitals and health facilities, upgrade roads and highways. Last month we announced a \$500 million economic booster shot to get dollars flowing swiftly to our municipalities, our communities, and our people. We put these much-needed infrastructure dollars directly into hands that need it.

With this budget, our government dedicated another \$1 billion to keep building on what we've already begun — to keep this province moving forward strong and steady. This \$1 billion will fix more schools and health care facilities in our province. It will expand child care centres in Saskatchewan, and improve our post-secondary system. It will fix more highways. And this \$1 billion investment will create more affordable housing and a better life for all Saskatchewan people.

I also would like to deal with a couple of more issues, Mr. Speaker, and they seem to centre around the member for Regina Douglas Park who had a very difficult time as the opposition spokesman, the point man for the criticism of the budget. I have to say, in my time in public life I've never actually seen a situation where the opposition critic ended up in more hot water than those that he was trying to criticize, but somehow that member has managed to accomplish that, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly, we had a claim from that member with regard to potash revenues. The member claimed that because of a decrease in production, we would see a decrease in revenue. And they've hinged the most part of their argument against the budget on this point or a variation of this point, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is though that the member for Regina Douglas Park, the former minister of Finance for this province, somehow had no idea how the potash royalty revenue system worked. He was completely wrong in his assertion. And I'll go into some detail on this, about how the potash royalty revenue system works. I know it's an exciting topic and our members are very well versed in it, but the members opposite obviously have very little idea as to how it works.

Basically, there's three revenue sources, three sources of revenue collected with regard to potash production. By far the most important is a graduated profit tax with a maximum rate of 35 per cent. And this profit tax is graduated on the basis of rate of the first 15 per cent of profit is . . . or sorry, on the first \$60 or 65 cents per tonne of profit, it's charged at the rate of 15 per cent and it goes up to 35 per cent per tonne; over 60, 65.

What that means is that for any potash production in this province, the vast majority of the tax collected, the royalty collected is from that profit tax. Therefore a decrease in production has very little impact, considering the changes made in 2001 and 2002 whereby 8 million tonnes or more are . . . anything over 8 million tonnes, basically, it doesn't matter. So production cuts aren't relevant, especially considering inventory. The member for Regina Douglas Park obviously didn't understand that. And for that reason his criticism was completely off base.

We also had the interesting scenario with an editorial in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* over the weekend making clear that that member had a lack of understanding as to how Crowns were financed. I'm not going to go into all the details on that, but it was again clear that a former minister of Finance in the NDP simply had very little idea as to how the finances of this province worked.

Secondly, another issue I wanted to address, Mr. Speaker — just the negativity coming from that side of the House. All we hear is doom and gloom and things are terrible. And you would think listening to the speeches from that side of the House that we were living in one of the worst jurisdictions in the world. And obviously, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we don't agree with that point of view.

We believe we are living in a fantastic province, a province doing very well, something that we should be proud of. We think it's something that the people of Saskatchewan are proud of. And it's disappointing to hear from that other side of the House doom and gloom, nothing but negativity. We hear them gnoming on to any piece of bad news. It's almost like they're cheering for things to go poorly, Mr. Speaker. And we believe that's a very irresponsible sort of position to take.

The other issue I'd like to address, we saw . . . This was one of the best cases of hypocrisy in public life I've ever seen. We had the member for Battlefords stand up day after day after day, introducing petitions with respect to the North Battleford hospital, the Saskatchewan Hospital. Now, Mr. Speaker, what makes this so interesting is the fact that that member, when in government on this side of the House, was the minister of Health — the minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, and in a position you would think to come forward with funding for a Saskatchewan Hospital.

At that time, the hospital was 97 years old; it's 100 years old now. Presumably the issues would have been very similar. But what did that member, what did that member do, Mr. Speaker, as the minister of Health on the government side of the House? Nothing. He didn't do anything.

Yet now we see the member standing up day after day after day after day after day introducing petitions to have the hospital funded. So I just find it incredibly, stunningly hypocritical — perhaps unsurprising; nonetheless though, disappointing to see.

In terms of what's happening, I want to talk a bit about what's happening in Meadow Lake, a constituency that's doing well. We have some real challenges on the forestry front and we're working closely with industry to address those. But there are some really good things happening in Meadow Lake, Mr. Speaker.

And I would point to, as anybody watching from Meadow right now knows, the town of Meadow Lake, you can see from almost any place in town a giant crane, Mr. Speaker. And that crane is constructing, along with a number of large construction crew, a new courthouse in Meadow Lake — a need that's been there, a need that's been identified for a very, very long time, that there's been a need for a new courthouse in Meadow Lake.

And you know what, Mr. Speaker? The NDP didn't get the job done. They didn't get the job done. They had a very long time to get the job done; they didn't get it done. And in the words of my colleague from Carrot River Valley, we're getting 'er done, Mr. Speaker.

We also in Meadow Lake are very excited, very excited about a new, a long-term care facility which this government announced, which this government is going to be going forward with. Again a 60-year-old facility, Mr. Speaker, a long-time need for replacement, a long-time need for refurbishment. And over the course of the last 16 years of NDP government, what did we get? Nothing. We got nothing. Sixteen months of the Saskatchewan Party government, Mr. Speaker, and we're getting 'er done.

In conclusion I would very much encourage my colleagues opposite . . . We've heard them, we've heard them support a number of initiatives in this budget. They complimented a number of initiatives. We've asked them where they would make changes. They really have no idea where they would make changes. They're obviously opposing simply for the purpose of opposing.

I would challenge the members opposite to support the position of their constituents, to support their constituencies, to look at this budget and to make the tough call to tell their party leadership: no, this is right for the people of Saskatchewan; this is right, this is right for the people of my constituency, and I'll be supporting this budget. I make that challenge to the members opposite and I'm hopeful, I'm hopeful that there will be some that will put the best interests of their constituency ahead of their party and will vote for this.

In conclusion I will obviously be supporting this fantastic budget and opposing the ridiculous amendment.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — I recognize the member from Athabasca.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the budget debate today and, like I've said before, I listened with great interest at what the member from Meadow Lake was explaining to the people and just telling the Sask Party, much like their current Minister of Finance, he needs a bit of work in terms of trying to understand numbers and trying to explain numbers to people. And that's one of the reasons why I will not be supporting the budget, Mr. Speaker.

But I watch with great interest, Mr. Speaker. I watch with great interest some of the comments made by the members opposite, and they remind me kind of, of a gong show. And really trying to pat each other on the back and trying to confuse the people and trying to convince people that this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. And this budget, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly doesn't cut it in any way, shape, or form.

I will point out that one of the things I want to do this evening or this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is to take a page out of David Letterman's late night talk show role when he talks about the top 10 reasons to not do this, or the top 10 reasons to do this. And what I want to do if I can, Mr. Speaker, is to kind of follow a similar format in terms of Mr. Letterman in the tonight show.

The top 10 reasons why you should be voting NDP in 2011. And of course one of the reasons that we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, is of course their budgetary prowess and their skill is simply not there.

But number 10 on the list of the top 10, Mr. Speaker, is Sask Party's inheritance honeymoon is almost over. And once we wake up to this deficit bride, Saskatchewan will return in record numbers to the NDP, Mr. Speaker. That's number 10.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Number nine reason why you should be voting NDP in 2011 is — make no mistake about it — number nine, our target date to rid this province of the Saskatchewan Party, NDP wannabes, is 2011, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Number eight, any time you have a party so desperate to avoid names for their party, like their affiliation, maybe Conservative or Reform or Alliance, that they have to name their party after our own province, that's desperation, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — So I look at them and I was thinking, if they're looking at some proper names, why didn't they consider their party name being names the Roughrider party — they're pretty popular; maybe the Craven celebration party, or maybe the Rolling Stones party, or maybe the curling fans party. But, Mr. Speaker, they wanted to avoid everything conservative in their name, so they chose to name their party after Saskatchewan. What a great disservice to our great province,

Mr. Speaker.

Number seven, that we stand very proud, as a party, of our history of how the NDP built this province. And how under Tommy Douglas, we re-took this province from many interests. And they seem to forget, Mr. Speaker. And how we have strengthened our base as a province, through the work of people like Lloyd and Blakeney. And how Romanow brought this province back from the brink of bankruptcy caused by that government, Mr. Speaker — caused by the people across the way.

We owe Romanow our greatest deal of gratitude. And thank goodness we had the NDP when we had the NDP to bring this province back, Mr. Speaker. And a lot of people didn't forget that. And a lot of people will never forget that, Mr. Speaker.

People will also know that no government in the history of this country, no incoming government in the history of this country has ever inherited a booming economy, billions in the bank, and an optimistic growing province — not one party ever inherited that except those guys, Mr. Speaker. And I quote, Calvert delivered that to Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, we can all be proud as NDPers that we left this province in very, very good financial position. And my only message, my only message to the Minister of Finance and that party opposite, please don't mess it up. Please. He's got two more years. Just sit tight. Relax. Don't mess it up. Okay, guys?

And what's at number six? Sixth reason why we should be voting NDP and not Saskatchewan Party, is once we assume power in 2011 the so-called Saskatchewan Party can go back to their natural role — opposition. They have been so ingrained, so ingrained as their role as opposition members that they still blame the NDP for everything happening today. And, Mr. Speaker, they've got to stop hiding behind the NDP. You've got to stop hiding behind the NDP when things get rough. They claim everything bad was caused by the NDP, but everything good was created by the Sask Party.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, what an insulting thing to say to the people of Saskatchewan. Because, Mr. Speaker, the people of Saskatchewan know, they know that the NDP left this province in very good financial position, and they know across the way. So this whole notion of them saying, we've done all of these wonderful things — like, give it up already. People aren't buying it. People aren't buying it. And when you insult them, it encourages them to vote NDP.

The fifth reason, the fifth reason why you should be voting NDP in 2011 is that the NDP missed being re-elected for the fifth term the last election by 6,000 votes, Mr. Speaker — 6,000 votes and 10 seats. And so far what have these guys done? What have these guys done? They've betrayed the unions. They've betrayed the labour movement, the working men and women in this province. They've abandoned the post-secondary students; they've abandoned them time and time again. They've neutered the school divisions — they're out of the picture now. They've penalized urban centres. They've rejected the First Nations community. They've turned their backs to the Métis.

And, Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden the 6,000 votes in Meadow

Lake and in Regina South and Moose Jaw and Saskatoon and Prince Albert, all of a sudden those votes are coming our way, Mr. Speaker. They're coming our way now. They're starting to realize they made a mistake here. They experimented and they realized that they made a mistake.

Mr. Speaker, imagine now if we fast-forward three months from now, that the next new leader of the Saskatchewan NDP is going to deliver a lot for this province, has a lot to offer, and will be delivering. So imagine that for a moment, Mr. Speaker.

The fourth reason why you should vote NDP in 2011 is every single announcement made by that government has an NDP-approved stamp on it, Mr. Speaker. Every single project that they have undertaken, we had started, Mr. Speaker. And they are following our lead and we thank them. We thank them. Nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with that.

And about the only promise, about the only promise that I see them keeping, Mr. Speaker, is that they actually set the future election date. And, Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House absolutely love it, Mr. Speaker. We are looking forward to 2011, and certainly that's something that we want to push within our movement and within our party.

Reason number three: in 2011 we will present to the people of Saskatchewan a forward-looking NDP movement that'll be exciting, dynamic, and inclusive. It'll not betray the people that they betrayed with this budget, Mr. Speaker.

And the other important difference to note is that this new NDP will not be saddled with paying \$3 million a day — that we paid when we were in government — in interest payment and debt reduction during our entire term as government, Mr. Speaker. Three million dollars each and every single day. And people understand that. People understand that, and they're excited by that.

And the most amazing thing is, after 16 months, Saskatchewan knows something that that tired, old Sask Party government doesn't know. They know that being government is more than figuring out how to spend the inheritance money that the NDP and the Saskatchewan people left you. It's a lot more than that, Mr. Speaker.

And let me tell you, in 2011, with our new leadership, the NDP will be very different and be very dynamic in comparison to that tired, old Sask Party government. Mr. Speaker, 16 months and they're tired already.

And what'd I tell people after the last election, Mr. Speaker, is I said, they're back. That's the second reason. They're back. They're back to finish off what they started in the 1990s. Here we have this budget. They're increasing debt. They're attacking the Crowns. They're doing it a little sneakier now, this time. They're providing unsustainable tax cuts. You'll see. They'll be unsustainable. And their spending's off the scales. And, Mr. Speaker, this budget is built on sand.

So the whole notion is, they're back to come and finish off what they started in the '90s. And the only group that's going to stop them is the good people of Saskatchewan, alongside of a new, invigorated NDP.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Mr. Speaker, part of the second reason of why these guys are not the answer we had is, on a more serious note, is the grandest and perhaps the greatest opportunity — the grandest and perhaps the greatest opportunity — to do something with the First Nations and Métis people was this year.

This was the year, Mr. Speaker, that we all were waiting for, under the whole notion of duty to consult, duty to accommodate. The First Nations were looking for leadership under this government to address housing, to address highways, to address health care, and the list goes on. And what happened was the minister responded that she had 80 meetings. And Mr. Speaker, after 80 meetings with the First Nations and Métis People there's one thing that they wanted: results.

One small thing they wanted was a thing called results, Mr. Speaker. And in the meantime, that minister didn't even speak to the minister or the member or the Minister of Environment, the minister of Energy and Mines. Didn't talk to any of her colleagues. In the meantime, every year, every single year that they lose this opportunity, every day there's permits being issued, there are oil and gas companies all over the place and different people doing a lot of wonderful things on the land, but they are excluding the First Nations and the Métis people.

And I said in this Assembly and I'll say it again, that that party, the Saskatchewan Party, has rejected the aspirations and the dreams of the First Nations, and they've turned their back on the Métis people as well. And I say to them, shame. And that's one of the reasons why we are not going to be supporting this budget, Mr. Speaker. People ought to know that the First Nations come here and they actually had a genuine belief that something would be done. Like the union movement and like the urban centres and like a lot of other people, Mr. Speaker, they actually believed that something was going to be done.

And what happened was the minister said, okay, let's all dance around the fireplace singing "Kumbaya," holding hands, and everything will be great. Well, Mr. Speaker, the dancing partners have had enough dancing. They've had enough of the holding hands. They want action, Mr. Speaker. They want action and this was the year that they had to deliver and guess what, nothing — absolutely nothing.

And you don't think that the people aren't motivated? They aren't motivated by that fact, that they reached out, and they got their hands slapped away and they got the back turned on them? They know, and let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, memories live long and hard. The opportunity to do something was totally rejected by that government and totally dismissed by that minister. And forever that's the history — I think it's really shameful — as a result of this year's budget.

I'll point out, Mr. Speaker, that there's no doubt in my mind, when we talk about some of the challenges the First Nations and the Métis people face in this province, we hear a lot of the stories of the poverty and of the challenges of all the First Nations and Métis people. And you know they have been asking, the First Nations have been saying, look, we don't want any handouts. We don't want to go back to you guys and keep

asking you guys for all these things. We just want to make sure we are part of the economy and part of the equation for a successful Saskatchewan. That's what they wanted.

You know why they wanted that access? Because they wanted to have the ability to develop their communities socially and economically. And all these great champions in the back over there that are going to fight for the First Nations and Métis people, all of a sudden they're pretty quiet now.

All of a sudden they're pretty quiet, and they're not saying a word now. Well why is that, Mr. Speaker? You know why? Because they could not deliver, Mr. Speaker. They could not deliver. I think it's very, very important, very important that people understand exactly what is going on.

So I want to re-cap. I want to re-cap as quickly as I can the top ten reasons — then I'll get to number one, Mr. Speaker — the top ten reasons why you should be voting, you should be voting for the NDP in 2011.

Number ten, Sask Party's inheritance is coming to an end. The party and the honeymoon is coming to an end. Number nine — make no mistake about it — the target date to rid this province of the Sask Party is 2011. And number eight, any time you have a party that names itself after the province has to have some kind of desperation attached to it.

And we're also pointing out, Mr. Speaker, we're proud of our history as a party. And it's also very important is that when we assume power in 2011, the Sask Party can go back to their natural roles where they can hide behind the NDP or blame the NDP, because that's all they ever do in government. They have no imagination, no skill, and no desire to address some of these things, Mr. Speaker.

And number five is the shift is on, the shift is on. Those guys across the way can hoot and holler all they want, but the shift is on because they've made certain choices, and those choices are going to come back and bite them on their heels, Mr. Speaker.

It should be pointed out again every single plan, every single announcement that they had, we put our stamp on it, so the process will unfold and continue moving forward.

And number three, we present the Saskatchewan people with a greatest forward-looking NDP move in 2011, and of course part of that is the failed, the failed plan by them to address First Nations and Métis peoples issues.

But, Mr. Speaker, the number one reason they should be voting NDP in 2011 is when we assume power in 2011, number one, we'll be powering up a new radio station that will be on the air 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And we're going to invite people from all walks of life throughout all of Saskatchewan, to call in and give us their one-sided, candid, unfiltered opinion of John Gormley, Mr. Speaker. And I'll point out, the most important thing is that he doesn't have a chance to rebut. And we're going to call it something like, talkative radio.

But, Mr. Speaker, as you can surmise by now, this budget misses a lot of points, a lot of serious points, so therefore I will not be voting in support of this budget. I'll be standing in

support of the amendment that recognizes the challenges and the weaknesses of that government, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: — Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Being near 5 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 17:00.]

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Premier

Hon. Bob Bjornerud
Minister of Agriculture
Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan
Crop Insurance Corporation

Hon. Bill Boyd
Minister of Energy and Resources
Minister Responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Ken Cheveldayoff
Minister of Crown Corporations

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Gaming Authority
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Minister Responsible for Northern Affairs

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